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First-Year Postsecondary Student Persistence Leading to Second-Year Enrollment

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Collene Gallimore-Webb

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MA, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2012

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

At a southeastern U.S. university, the low retention of postsecondary, traditional-aged first-year students persisting to second year was a problem, importantly decreasing their ability to graduate and gain a career. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that have motivated postsecondary traditional-aged, first-year students to return to the university as second-year students and to learn from students what they perceived that the institution could do to increase persistence. The conceptual framework that grounded this study was Tinto's institutional departure model. The research questions explored the factors that motivated first-year students to persist into their second year of college and perceptions of these students of what the university could do to increase student persistence. A basic qualitative study was the research design; nine students who had returned for the second year were interviewed. The data were transcribed, and open and axial coding were used to identify four themes: student application of college readiness skills advanced first-year success; support from family and friends was useful for increased student persistence from first year to second year; increased faculty-to-student communications could increase students' persistence and retention; and the action of university personnel, faculty, and advisors influenced the persistence of students. The findings were used to design a professional development program to inform and train academic advisors about factors related to persistence and retention. Positive social change may result in increased retention at the local university through increased advisor strategies that help students to persist and graduate.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated in humbled adoration to my son and daughter, Cody and Cheyenne Webb, and my granddaughter, Cailyn Webb, for their endearing love, support, and inspiration throughout my doctoral journey. I would like to honor my mom, Emma Newman, for her positive support, love, and encouragement.

In memory, I want to dedicate this capstone to honor my dad, R.C. Gallimore, who exemplified hard work and determination and in honor of my stepdad, "Grandpa" Pete Newman and siblings, Daune Lawson, Gary Gallimore, Junior Gallimore, Steve Gallimore, and Donald William Gallimore. A special memory with dedication to my grandparents, Thurston and Martha Marshall Gallimore and Burton and Hulda McGrady Alderman, and to my aunts and uncles for their favorable life influences.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Retention rates of first-year, traditional-aged, postsecondary students are a challenge at UEU (pseudonym), a local southeastern public, accredited, coeducational, research university in the United States awarding baccalaureate, masters, specialty, and doctoral degrees. The problem was the low retention rate of the traditional-aged, first-year students at UEU. According to the national center for education statistics (NCES, 2016), 76% of the approximate 16,000 students at UEU persisted as second-year students in fiscal year 2016-17. The office of institutional research at UEU reported the retention rate of 2015 full-time undergraduates at 75.6% with an approximate dropout rate at 24%.

The retention rate for fiscal year 2016 was 77.5% with an approximate dropout rate of 22%. For full-time, degree seeking students who started college in 2017, only 76.6% persisted with a dropout rate at 23%. At UEU, student persistence and retention are significant for the success of the university. Tuition funds at UEU help to sustain financial operations of the university. Increased graduation rankings at the university may aid in more prospective student enrollments.

The gap in practice was a lack of understanding of the factors that influence first-year students at UEU to enroll in the second year and what strategies the university might implement to increase persistence. According to the NCES (2016), the national retention rate was 81% for first-time and full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students who enrolled in 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2016. The National Student

Clearinghouse Research Center (2019) indicated that the 2017 fall retention rates showed

26% of students did not have the persistence needed for enrollment to second year.

Petty (2014) noted that "institutions play an important role in motivating students

by understanding intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate students to remain in

college" (p.1). According to Petty, postsecondary institutions need to develop successful

mechanisms to help students overcome barriers and persist to graduation. Wismath and

Newberry (2019) conducted a study of first-year experience courses and found that the

retention of students in universities or other postsecondary education programs were a

common persistence problem through the first year to second year. Sanders et al. (2016)

found that perceived threats to students' grade expectations had a negative influence on

postsecondary students' motivation and commitment in terms of successful persistence.

Students' unrealistic optimism in terms of high grades conflicted with disappointment as

marks fell short of the high expectations.

Rationale

The vice chancellor of enrollment at UEU when discussing problems at the

institution, stated that "research to understand the motivational connections to the

persistence rates could be useful in creating retention strategies" (personal

communication, June 19, 2018). Roberts (2018) stated that students remained persistent

and engaged when educators used success terminology instead of failure terminology,

changing attrition, failure, and withdrawal, to persistence and retention. Rather than

focusing on attrition of first-year students, I studied the persistence and retention of first-year students.

Patterson et al. (2017) stated that about 30% of U.S. students will drop out during their first- year of college. Patterson et al. stated problems with persistence and retention lead to negative consequences for individuals. Johnson (2018) stated that senior leaders of higher education institutions were concerned about declining student persistence.

Garcia-Ros et al. (2018) stated that persistence at a university was difficult to understand because it involves student characteristics such as seeking help and self-esteem and contextual variables such as effective learning, interpersonal relationships, and problem-solving. Garcia-Ros et al. argued that strengthening support services helped resolve social, academic, and emotional difficulties of students. Supplemental instruction may also help to retain students. The senior director of first-year engagement and experience at UEU said "it is useful to study and understand first to second year persistence from a microlevel to facilitate retention interventions at the local university" (personal communication, March 11, 2020). The purpose of this project study was to determine the factors that have motivated traditional-aged, first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students and to learn what they perceived the institution could do that would increase persistence.

Definition of Terms

The terms are common terms used to inform this study and used in higher education settings:

Motivation: Students' internal or external energy that creates a desire to act (Hyatt, 2018).

Persistence: For the purposes of this study, a steady and consistent continuation of enrollment working toward a degree for graduation (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019).

Persistence rate: The annual percentage rate of students who return to an institution for continued matriculation (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018).

Retention: The persistence of a student to maintain enrollment at a college or university after a semester or quarter of completion for continued learning (Stavredes & Herder, 2014).

Retention rate: An institutional rate examined upon each new semester or quarter to quantify the number of students who have returned (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018).

Significance of the Study

Examining the motivations and persistence of students as first-year students at UEU may provide insights into guiding future first-year students to persist toward the second year, thus increasing retention rates. Findings from this study may inform retention managers at UEU when they develop and implement retention strategies to improve persistence of first-year students. The purpose of this study was to determine the

factors that have motivated traditional-aged, first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students and to learn from students what they perceived that the institution could do that would increase persistence.

Research Question(s)

The problem addressed was the low retention rate of the traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students at UEU. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that have motivated traditional-aged, first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students and to learn from students what they perceived that the institution could do that would increase persistence. I conducted a basic qualitative research study to answer the research questions using interviews to achieve an understanding of first-year students' persistence. In order to identify factors that motivate first-year, postsecondary students, I focused on the following research questions.

RQ1: What factors do traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students identify that motivated them to persist into their second year of college?

RQ2: What do traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students perceive that the institution could implement to increase future students' persistence from first year to second year?

Review of the Literature

I conducted this literature review using the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Sage, Academic Search Complete, and Education Research Complete. Google Scholar and the National Center for Education Statistics were also used. Walden

University online library services, journals, books, and websites were used as resources. A search resulted in extensive peer-reviewed scholarly articles with saturation reached.

Primary searching involved using key words such as *retention, increasing retention, first-year college success, academic success, increasing persistence, first-year transition, higher education graduation, retention factors, second-year transition, higher education retention, motivation, first-year students, extrinsic motivation, peer influence, persistence factors, college students, intrinsic motivation, persistence, motivation theorists,* and *higher education persistence*. I searched peer-reviewed research articles to gain an understanding of the current literature in relation to the topic. This review of the literature was organized into the following topics: research regarding persistence of first-year college students and research regarding retention of first-year college students.

Conceptual Framework

Tinto's (1993) institutional departure (ID) model was used as a framework in this study to examine the problem of low retention rates of first-year, postsecondary students at UEU, a local university. In the ID model, Tinto asserted that social involvement and academic experience have a positive influence on student persistence and educational outcomes. Tinto studied retention rates of first year college students looking for patterns and asking the question, what can be done to enhance student retention in higher education?

In the ID model, Tinto (1993) indicated that over half of the students did not persist to second year. Han et al. (2017) specified that Tinto's 1993 ID model has been

explored frequently, theorizing that students' retention was dependent upon their integration within the institutions' existing academic and social structures. According to Tinto, students enter the institution with differing ranges of attributes and backgrounds. The social and intellectual systems in the institution influence the students' retention through an effect on commitments and goals. Student departure was likely, according to Tinto, when the absence of interaction results in lowered commitments to the institution and goals. Tinto connected social and academic integration with persistence, noting that a lack of social interaction and academic achievement negatively effects intrinsic motivation and creates persistence and retention problems.

Tinto (1993) described the first year as important in developing persistence, explaining that first-year experiences influence subsequent persistence throughout students' academic journey. In my study, I examined the factors that have motivated first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students. Self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment may influence the intrinsic motivation for students' persistence.

An important factor in the ID model is a student's ability to achieve high academic status (Tinto, 1993). Tinto indicated that voluntary departures reflect what goes on within college more so than what occurred prior to entry and/or what takes place outside of college. Tinto stated that institutions that are committed to their students will find that the students are more likely to persist. The interview questions that I used in my study were based on the ID model (Appendix B). When I analyzed the data, I grounded my analysis and discussion of the results using the ID model.

Review of the Broader Problem

Retention and persistence have been two areas interconnected with student success. Persistence is a precursor to retention for first-year students (Han et al., 2017). The first-year students who persist at the university will be retained for second year while the students who do not persist are not retained.

Research Related to Persistence Factors of First-year College Students

Persistence is necessary for students to obtain their educational goals. Hand et al. (2022) found a correlation with student persistence and self- perception. Hand et al. indicated that students' resiliency increased with a positive self-perception of their mental and physical health factors. Griffin et al. (2022) indicated that a relationship exists between student engagement in learning and student persistence. According to Griffin et al., first-year college students need academic, social, and financial support from institutions.

Frischmann and Moor (2017) indicated that semester transition can be a factor affecting persistence for some college students through an array of features including new class schedules, classmates, instructors, expectations, and courses. The semester transition factor involved figuring out how to help students persist through the first year of college.

Motivation as a Factor in Persistence. According to Han et al. (2017), the motivation factor in persistence may be a precursor to the students' academic performance and retention. Han et al. defined motivation as a guide to a person's

behavior and energy, which affected persistence. In a quasiexperimental study, Parker-Young (2017) found that the motivational factor in persistence affected higher education retention. According to Parker-Young, motivation for retention was needed to persist. As a factor in persistence, motivation may prove to be a direct correlation with retention for students in higher education.

Stephenson et al. (2020) indicated that students who participated in a survey at a university showed increased persistence. Notable student retention was met even 18 months following the survey, which suggested retainment potential for students who took the survey. Stephenson et al. discussed that commitment and engagement were consistent for students and impacted first-year student retention. Savage et al. (2019) found that students who persisted to meet the goal of graduation at their institution possessed strong commitment to the desired outcome of goal completion, which helped to motivate their continued efforts to persist.

According to Elliott (2020), academic advisors play a crucial role in both attracting and retaining students at higher education institutions. Elliott indicated that the academic advisors' role in encouraging students to persist is important for student motivation to persistence. According to Elliott, academic advisors serve students through counseling and guiding students through a myriad of complex tasks throughout the students' first year at the university. Students seek assistance from academic advisors in categories of childcare, job hunting, financial matters, and relations at the university.

Extrinsic Motivation as a Factor in Persistence. Rothes et al. (2017) defined

extrinsic motivation as the consequences or rewards related to academic performance. Rothes et al. identified higher grades, money, and honors as examples of factors that affect extrinsic reinforcement for persistence. In a qualitative study, Rothes et al. found that extrinsic motivation produced favorable outcomes in learning, achievement, satisfaction, and well-being. Lerdpornkuirat et al. (2018) indicated that students' motivation and engagement were associated with persistence. In a quantitative study, Lerdpornkuirat et al. found that students' persistence was enhanced through a connected learning environment with peers, instructors, and the university, which contributed to college persistence, which was deemed critical for first-year students in higher education.

Spight (2020) noted that students who matriculated with a declared major were more likely to persist, which has implications for advising. Extrinsic motivation of first-year students may be a component for persistence in higher education. Stinespring et al. (2020) confirmed that student motivation, academic ability, and financial aid impact student retention. According to Stinespring et al., influences of peer effects such as dormitory roommates, extracurricular, and co-curricular groups in relation to academic ability and motivation increased retention. Tafreschi and Thiemann (2016), through a quantitative study, indicated that a lower-than-expected academic standing for some students increased dropout probabilities, thereby grades may have an influence on persistence.

According to Roksa and Whitley (2017), academic success is dependent on academic motivation. In a quantitative study exploring the roles of motivation and

faculty, Roksa and Whitley found that student-centered faculty helped students translate their academic motivation into academic success with continued persistence. Researchers have extensively studied retention and persistence. In a quantitative study, Luke and Justice (2016) found that students benefit from personal achievement, increased income, job security, and advanced professionalism when they are able to persist and complete their program and obtain their degrees. According to Luke and Justice, students who have increased persistence meet their academic goals.

In a quantitative study, Ashraf et al. (2018) determined whether college students' persistence in finding a suitable major influenced them to persist through graduation. Ashraf et al. suggested that universities should help students explore which major may be the best fit for them to be able to persist. According to Ashraf et al., students who steadily apply persistence increase their retention and academic achievement. Further, Ashraf et al. noted that students showed a lost interest in their academic goals when persistence was not consistently applied.

According to Sogunro (2015), understanding what motivates and sustains student learning in the higher education process is critical to the students' persistence. Sogunro found that students learn best when they are motivated to learn, which impacts their persistence. Quality of instruction and curriculum, timely feedback, and effective academic advising affect students' motivation.

According to Hendijani, et al. (2016), motivation and performance can be affected by rewards to increase persistence. In the study, Hendijani et al. found that a special

payment schema supported external reward and motivation and had a positive effect on overall motivation. According to Munoz et al. (2019), lecturers and tutors frequent and caring interactions with students foster engagement for students during the first year. Munoz et al. indicated that students' peer interactions promoted sense of belonging to the institution through friendships with on-campus peers.

Intrinsic Motivation as a Factor in Persistence. Intrinsic motivation in relation to persistence of first-year students has been examined in the higher education field. In a case study, Meens et al. (2018) found that intrinsic motivation generated persistent behavior. Meens et al. indicated that internal satisfaction was due to the interest and enjoyment of a behavior leading students to attend college and learn in order to increase their persistence. According to du Toit-Brits and van Zyl (2017), learning has a positive relationship to intrinsic motivation thus increasing persistence. Motivation as a factor in persistence was associated with academic achievement (Meens et al., 2018). Johnson (2021) found that intrinsic motivation and students' internal desire was a factor affecting graduation and persistence.

When looking at determinants to first-year college success, Brouwer et al. (2016) found that they were either directly or indirectly affected by motivation to achieve. Brouwer et al. noted that intrinsic satisfaction gained from good grades influenced students' motivation to persist. When a student experiences a lack of self-motivation, their internal drive diminishes goal setting (Brouwer et al., 2016). In a longitudinal study, Hou and Liu (2018) found that intrinsic motivation promoted academic achievement.

Good academic standing may increase student internal satisfaction and persistence. Students with high academic success may experience high intrinsic motivation, thereby the students' persistence may be impacted (Hou & Liu, 2018).

In a quantitative study Rizkallah and Seitz (2017) found that the stages of academic career change throughout the academic span for students at different levels of their studies. According to Rizkallah and Seitz, universities must rethink their retention strategies to improve students' satisfaction with their academic experience throughout their college careers. Students experience different motivators during their academic progression with different concerns, problems, and needs at each stage. The freshmen stage was identified as a discovery stage whereby the students were starting to build experiences with the university.

During the establishment stage, sophomore students commit to a degree as the university provides support and encouragement. In the engagement stage, junior students decided their major and established social life on campus and learned more about career opportunities. The future-driven stage gave the challenge of graduation and getting a job for senior students. Rizkallah and Seitz (2017) found that students' satisfaction and motivation differed throughout their academic lives as seen for freshmen and seniors. Seniors were less satisfied with the value they received for their tuition dollars and unlikely to recommend the university to others.

Self-Determination as a Factor in Persistence. Research supports a potential direct link between intrinsic motivation, learning, retention, and persistence. Mitchall and

Jaeger (2018) conducted a case study and found that parents' role in student college planning, role modeling, and encouragement enhanced self-determination of students for academic success and persistence. Alsharari and Alshurideh (2020) indicated that creativity, emotional intelligence, and learner autonomy affected students' retention.

Lambert (2017) found that motivation was related to students' persistence. In a qualitative study, Lambert indicated that self-determination leads to persistence and goal attainment while low self-determination results in poor decisions and unattainable goals with reduced progress. According to Petrie et al. (2018), academic satisfaction was found to be related to persistence toward educational goals. Petrie et al. found that the possession of high motivation and strong self-determination skills may make a positive difference for goal achievement and persistence.

Social Integration as a Factor in Persistence. In a quantitative study, Garcia-Ros et al. (2018) found that motivation and social interaction showed effects on persistence in the first-year university experience. Garcia-Ros et al. indicated that strengthening the support services programs for first-year students is important to resolve difficulties they may have in the first year of university. Students' social interaction influenced their intrinsic motivation to persist while students' motivation to persist diminished when there was a lack of social integration. Young (2020) indicated that universities increase student persistence through providing an enriched first-year experience. According to Young (2020), the connective thread is created when students attend orientation to campus resources that gives students a sense of belonging to the

university. Students who display a sense of belonging may show intensified motivation to persist.

Gillen-O'Neel (2021) indicated the importance of sense of belonging for engagement and persistence of students. According to Gillen-O'Neel, students personal-level and daily dynamics of sense of belonging increases were related to higher levels of student engagement for persistence. In a qualitative case study, Means and Pyne (2017) found that a sense of belonging provides an opportunity for forming peer relationships, and a lack of social belonging may negatively affect persistence for some students. Navigation of the first year with institutional support structures reinforced the students' sense of belonging in the academic boundary of college life and impacted persistence.

According to Cheong et al. (2021), a connection was identified between first-year college students increased academic self-efficacy and frequent communications with on-campus peers. According to Lane (2020), peer mentoring has emerged as a viable retention strategy to increase first year and beyond. Peer mentoring helps students to gain a social connection with both experienced peers and the university.

Self-Efficacy as a Factor in Persistence. In an exploratory study of undergraduates, Ariani (2017) found that individuals who are not intrinsically motivated are individuals who have a low self-confidence to meet their academic goals. According to Ariani, low self-efficacy is associated with the inability to persist. Reduced self-efficacy or a lack of self-confidence may negatively impact persistence for some

students. Furthermore, Ariani concluded that intrinsic motivation has significance in increasing self-efficacy for academic persistence.

Bandura (1997) described self-efficacy as an individual's confidence in his or her ability to attain pre-determined goals. Self-efficacy involves an exertion and a level of self-control. Thompson and Verdino (2019) indicated that an important factor, self-efficacy, affects academic motivation, persistence, and success. In an exploratory study, Thompson and Verdino found average to high levels of self- efficacy resulted in academic success and student persistence.

In a quantitative study, Litoiu and Oproiu (2018) found that the importance of creating proper study environments, organizing learning support activities, and initiating educational and career counseling activities for first-year college students enhanced motivation and self-confidence for persistence resulting in graduation. Litoiu and Oproiu argued that the transition to a university represents a challenge for first-year college students, which may impact persistence for some students. Although some students persist through challenges, other students do not persist, which supports the study of factors that impact persistence and retention of first-year students. Policymakers and faculty need to understand students' motivation to learn to build persistence for retention strategies. According to Litoiu and Oproiu, family dynamics, financial aid, and other external factors may hold a key to the persistence of some students.

Financial Aid as a Factor in Persistence. Financial conditions and parental support may impact the students' ability to persist in higher education. The award of

financial aid and financial support from family may generate persistence in education for some students. In a case study, Van Duser et al. (2020) indicated that finances affected first-year student retention. Van Duser et al. noted the importance of understanding the problem affecting student persistence.

In a quantitative study, Britt et al. (2017) examined over 2,400 undergraduate students related to their persistence and financial stress. Findings of the study indicated a correlation between college persistence and financial stress for some students. According to Britt et al., students who had a perception of having high loan debt withdrew before completion of their academic pursuits.

In a study of summer bridge program students, Quayyum et al. (2019) found that financial aid had a positive impact on students' persistence in higher education. Students in this study, who did not qualify for financial aid because of low grade point average, were likely to withdraw from their programs. Financial aid is a factor that impacts persistence. Lin et al (2020) indicated that when students receive grants and aid their persistence was increased. In a case study, Van Duser et al. (2020) indicated that finances affected first-year student retention. Van Duser et al. noted the importance of understanding the problem affecting student persistence.

Olbrecht et al. (2016) found that family financial contribution improved student persistence during the sophomore year. Olbrecht et al. explained that persistence was impacted by the number of finances available for education from the family to the student. As noted by Olbrecht et al., family financial aid is helpful for students to obtain

academic goals. Institutions that offer financial planning and forecasting may allow more students to persist.

Research Regarding Retention of First-year College Students

Brooker et al. (2017), in a qualitative study, found that the first year of university is a time of difficulties which may impact retention. Brooker et al. noted the most prevalent difficulties for students were managing time, workload, and family and friends' expectations. According to Brooker et al., when students perceive a difficulty, they need more support to overcome the difficulty and meet their full academic potential.

Williams et al. (2018) indicated the impact that college retention rates have on the reputation of an institution. According to Williams et al., understanding the factors that influence student retention will assist to increase the retention rate of freshmen. Interventions for a smooth transition to university and being able to identify students with difficulties were useful for increased retention of students. According to Rivera et al. (2020), the first year of university is challenging and difficult for students who are adjusting to different social and academic demands.

Social Integration as a Factor in Retention

In a qualitative case study, Means and Pyne (2017) explored support structures, such as student organizations and faculty relationships related to first-year students obtaining a sense of belonging for enhanced retention. Means and Pyne found that support structures were a crucial component for first year staying power for some students. Mirijanian (2018) indicated that researchers have studied first-year college

student retention in association with persistence. According to Mirijanian, first-year seminars improve academic self-confidence of first-year students through involvement and socialization into the academic setting. Rucks-Ahidiana and Bork (2020) indicated that peer relationships supported students' first year at college. The relationships of students' provided insight into the development of a sense of belonging on campus and offered advice and support for first-year college goals.

Social belonging, such as participating in study groups, produces an external satisfaction with the university for increased retention. Delmas (2020) indicated the important role of faculty impacts student retention. According to Delmas, when faculty identified a student with retention issues the advisor of the student was notified, which may increase the student's retention at the university. In a qualitative phenomenological study, Christe (2015) found that first-year students felt connected to campus through their strong goal clarity and their degree commitment. According to Christe, social activities outside the classroom may not influence the retainment of students. In a quasiexperimental pilot study, Patterson et al. (2017) found that social belonging was correlated with persistence.

Academic Standing as a Factor in Retention

According to Tafreschi and Thiemann (2016), insufficiently prepared students begin college without understanding academic demands and the persistence required to meet the demands for retention. Tafreschi and Thiemann studied students who fall short of predefined performance requirements and repeat a course, a term, or a full year. In the

study, including 5000 participants, it was found that low academic performance increased

dropout probabilities after the first year. Grade retention increases dropout probabilities

after the first year and decreases the probability of enrollment into the second year.

Nicholes and Reimer (2020) indicated that first-year students receive support from

increased writing and rhetorical skills and knowledge, which increased their persistence

and retention.

Factors vary that motivate students' retention in higher education (Sogunro, 2015;

Bozeman et al., 2020). Effective academic advising helps increase graduation rates in

higher education when students meet academic goals, thereby academic success was a

factor affecting persistence of students (Sogunro, 2015). Bozeman et al. (2020) found a

connection between students' value and motivation to achieve an academic goal and

retention. According to Bozeman et al., the university goal of increasing enrollment and

retention was linked with students' goal attainment.

Bowers and Foley (2018) studied persistence at a university and found that first

year retention rates were higher when students prepared for university with increased

academic confidence and success. Students who enrolled with dual enrollment credit or

advanced placement English or mathematics credit had higher first year retention rates

than students who enrolled without dual enrollment credit or advanced placement English

or mathematics.

According to Browning et al. (2018), students' hope and gratitude were connected

to academic integration and institutional commitment. Browning et al. indicated the

importance of academic integration to institutional commitment noting that students'
character strengths (i.e., hope & gratitude) reflect a positive emphasis on the development
of academic achievement and persistence.

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature reviewed in the foregoing section included studies that highlighted
some of the factors that may affect first-year students' persistence, which leads to
increased retention at the university. Motivation was a factor mentioned to affect some
students' persistence. Rothes et al. (2017) defined extrinsic motivation as the
consequences or rewards related to academic performance. According to Rothes et al.,
higher grades, money, and honors were recognized as examples of factors that affect
extrinsic reinforcement for persistence. In a quantitative study, Meens et al. (2018) found
that intrinsic motivation generates persistent behavior. In their case study, Meens et al.
indicated that internal satisfaction is due to the interest and enjoyment of a behavior
leading students to attend college and learn in order to increase their persistence.

The previously discussed studies emphasized self-determination and academic
integration as factors influencing retention and persistence. Lambert (2017) suggested
that self-determination influenced goal attainment related to persistence. Tafreschi and
Thiemann (2016) studied students who fell short of predefined academic performance
requirements related to persistence.

In summary, the literature shows that there exist several factors that inspire
students' persistence and motivation. The primary factors that impacted the persistence

and retention of first-year students included in this literature review were intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, grittiness, social integration, academic standing, self-efficacy, self-determination, and financial support.

Implications

Two projects could have been developed based on the findings of the study. I could have developed a policy paper that would make recommendations to increase persistence of future first-year students. I could also have developed a professional development project that would include strategies that would help to increase persistence of future first-year students. The findings of the study led me to develop a professional development training to share findings that may help increase future students' persistence, to enhance advisors' knowledge about student persistence, and to give the advisors strategies to retain future students.

Summary

In Section 1 of this study, a local southeastern public university was introduced as the study site. The problem was defined along with the rationale for selecting the problem. The study significance was described, and the research questions were presented. A literature review including the conceptual framework was presented.

Section 2 provides a description of the qualitative research approach and design. I describe the participant sample and explain gaining access to the participants. In Section 2, I also address the data collection and data analysis, as well as my role as the researcher.

In Section 3, based on the findings, a thoughtful rationale of why the specific project was chosen is provided. I provide a review of the literature relating to the genre of the project. A three-day professional development training for first-year student advisors and their supervisors is designed and presented. A project evaluation plan is presented including goals of the project.

In Section 4, I describe my reflections and conclusions about the project. I discuss strengths and limitations of the project. Research recommendations for future studies are included for future researchers. In addition, I describe what I learned about the processes of conducting research and developing a project that applies the research findings. Lastly, I describe the implications for positive social change and provide a conclusion.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This section includes a description of the qualitative methodology that I used to conduct the project study. In this study, I addressed the problem of low retention rates of first-year students at a local university (UEU) by conducting a basic qualitative study. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that have motivated traditional-aged, first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students and to learn from students what they perceived that the institution could do to increase persistence.

I selected to use a basic qualitative research design for my study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), people construct knowledge to interpret activities, experiences, or phenomenon. Using a basic qualitative research design provided an avenue from which to determine how students make sense of their experiences and lives. In my study, basic qualitative research involved looking in-depth at students' perspectives relative to persistence and retention and analyzing the data to identify ways to answer the research questions. I designed an interview protocol to determine the in-depth factors that motivated first-year students to persist. Using semistructured interviews provided an opportunity to hear the authentic voice of each participant interviewed. The data were transcribed, and open and axial coding were used to obtain emerging themes. I addressed the following research questions using qualitative methods.

RQ1: What factors do traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students identify that motivated them to persist into their second year of college?

RQ2: What do traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students perceive that the institution could implement to increase future students' persistence from first year to second year?

Creswell (2012) indicated that a qualitative research design is used to collect verbal data from a small number of participants. Before I selected the basic qualitative research design, I investigated other methodologies such as the phenomenological approach. I did not select phenomenology as an approach because my focus was not to study the subject or phenomenon from the personal stories of the participants. I rejected using a quantitative approach because I felt that it would be less effective in examining the students' responses about the factors leading to second year persistence. Hypothesis testing and an experimental design were not needed to answer the research questions.

A qualitative ethnographic study was not selected because I did not need to explore the culture of participants interviewed to determine the perceptions of participants to answer the research questions (see Creswell, 2012). Although I considered a grounded theory research design, my goal was not to develop a theory, so the grounded theory research design was not selected. In addition, the narrative design was not appropriate for this study because my intent was not to understand the individual story of one person, but to understand factors affecting the persistence of a group (see Creswell, 2012).

I chose the basic qualitative research design as the most effective to answer the research questions. Merriam and Tisdale (2015) indicated that to explore and understand

experiences of others was a qualitative study. Mohajan (2018) noted that the use of qualitative methodology is credible to explore areas of human behavior in educational institutions. The participants' responses to the interview questions provided data about the factors that influence first-year students to persist by enrolling in the second year. In addition, participants' responses provided insights about strategies the university might implement to increase persistence.

<p style="text-align:center">Participants</p>

The participant pool for this project study was approximately 3,000 traditional age, first-year students who returned to the university for their second year in 2020. The office of institutional research at UEU reported that, based on the university enrollment, the population consisted of approximately 66% females and 25% males enrolled as first-year undergraduates for the 2020 enrollment year. Based on university enrollment, ethnicity demographic approximations at UEU were reported as Whites approximately 50%, Blacks 36%, Hispanics 14%, and other minorities 14% for the 2020 enrollment year.

According to Saxena (2017), the sample size for a qualitative study will range from between five to 50 participants. I invited 400 students to participate in my study. Of those invited, nine volunteered to participate. Gender of participants included two males and seven females. One participant was Hispanic, five were Asian or Black, two were White, and one was two or more race orientations. The criteria that I used to invite selected participants to participate in my study were the following: any student who (a)

had completed the first year of postsecondary education at the study site, (b) had successfully persisted to their second year and, (c) was of traditional age (18-23 years old). I recruited participants for my study from a pool of students who met the above criteria.

I contacted the institutional research office at UEU to obtain email addresses and contact information for approximately 3,000 potential participants. After the contact information was sent to me from the institutional research office, I sent an invitational email to 25 students using the random number generator from the list of potential participants. I planned to interview the first eight to 10 students who responded affirmatively to the email. As I did not receive any volunteers from the first set of invitations, I sent out more emails.

However, after sending about 65 invitations with no students volunteering to participate, a procedural change was made through the institutional review board (IRB) to give participants a $25 gift card for appreciation of participation and to send 10 invitations daily until I received nine participants. After adding the gift card to the invitational email and completion of 25 rounds of email invitations, I received nine positive responses from students. Nine student participants provided a balance between the number of participants and the depth of inquiry per individual. I accepted nine participants to interview to provide a deeper understanding of inquiry per individual.

I included a consent form with the invitational email. I verified that the affirming participants had read and understood the consent form by instructing that the affirming

response email contain "I consent" in the subject line, demonstrating consent. Each participant had to confirm and affirm the consent form before the interview could occur.

Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

In order to develop a researcher-participant working relationship, I introduced myself and asked if there were any questions before I started the interview. Next, I reviewed the consent form with each participant. I reminded the participants of their ability to withdraw at any time during the process without negative consequences which helped to establish trust. Participants were informed that their responses and coded transcripts would be safeguarded on a flash drive and stored in a locked fireproof file cabinet in my home office**.**

 I negotiated with each participant the best interview date and time to conduct the interview. I operated openly with participants throughout the interviews to help build trust. Trust was established as I explained that confidentiality of participant identity would be maintained throughout my study by the assignment of codenames or pseudonyms. Each participant was reminded of his/her ability to decline to answer any interview question. I informed participants about member checking as I read aloud the consent form. Finally, I proceeded to follow the interview protocol throughout the interview (see Appendix B).

Protection of Participant Rights

Following IRB approval and at the start of the interview, I reviewed the informed consent form with each participant. I asked the participant if there were any questions before I started the interview. I explained to each participant the interview process and followed the interview protocol to achieve equal treatment of participants. The interview questions were read to each participant exactly in the same order, with similar nuances, tone, and voice, and with the same wording for each interview question.

Confidentiality of the participant's personal information, responses, and identity was considered from the onset of this project. As a measure to protect the participants' identities, I assigned each participant a code or pseudonym such as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc. The code assigned to each participant was used to store, manage, and analyze the data and in discussions about the study results. No personal identifiers were included in the research journal, logs, or transcripts.

Before the interview began, a consent form was read to each participant. One of the main elements of the interview process involves informed consent. I explained the interview process, protection of participant's rights, and discussed privacy of data collection and data storage with each participant.

The participants' responses and coded transcripts have been placed on a flash drive that was stored in a locked fireproof file cabinet in my home office. For participant protection, I explained to each participant that confidentiality of participant identity would be maintained throughout my study by the assignment of codenames or pseudonyms. Only the codenames will be used in reporting the results of the study.

Each participant was reminded of his/her ability to decline to answer any interview question. I discussed with each participant the right to skip any question and/or leave the interview. I also discussed the right to decline the interview at any time before, during, and/or after the interview. I informed participants about member checking as I read aloud the consent form. In the consent form and before I began asking interview questions, I informed every participant of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

Data Collection

Interviews

I received Walden University's IRB approval for this basic qualitative study prior to collecting data. The IRB approval number for Walden University is 01-05-21-0727179. I conducted semistructured interviews using Zoom or telephone conference. I asked 10 open-ended questions of nine UEU participants. The use of semistructured interviews allowed me to add probing questions to learn additional information such as asking the participant to elaborate more or to give an example. I designed the interview questions to align with the research questions (see Appendix B).

To establish sufficiency of data collection, I engaged a retired Ph.D. professor from the local area to help me review my interview questions to answer the two research questions. That individual confirmed that the interview questions would be suitable to collect sufficient data. The interview questions were based on the literature review and

Tinto's (1993) factors that affect students' persistence and retention such as a sense of belonging, social integration, and academic engagement.

I used an audio-recorder on my cell telephone to record the interviews and provide data accuracy. The interview sessions lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. I asked the open-ended interview questions and appropriate probing questions that I developed (see Appendix B). Each participant was guaranteed confidentiality throughout the research study and reporting. All students who participated in my study received a $25.00 gift card to thank them for their valuable time. Additionally, before I began to ask the interview questions, I reminded the participants of their ability to withdraw at any time during the process without negative consequences and reviewed the consent form with each participant.

Keeping Track of Data

Immediately upon each interview conclusion, I made entries in a reflective journal noting my thoughts about responses to each interview question and/or other ideas regarding the persistence of students. I also maintained a research log for recording pertinent interview information such as the time and place of the interview, participant's email address for member checking, and the participant's code. No one except me had access to my reflective journal and research log.

I stored the interview transcripts and original recordings with the reflective journal and research log in a locked fireproof cabinet at my home office and will keep them for 5 years. To protect each participant's data, I filed the information on my

password protected laptop and transferred the content to a flash drive for storage in my locked fireproof cabinet at my home office. Data will be removed from my laptop after 5 years from Walden CAO approval. Shredding of hardcopy data and permanent deletion of the flash drive storage will be done after 5 years.

Role of the Researcher

During the research project, I was not employed at the study site and have never been employed at the study site. I did not know any of the potential participants at the institution prior to recruitment. When I called to ask about problems that I might study at the institution, the vice chancellor of enrollment informed me that there was a problem at the institution involving the declining retention rates of first-year students. I chose to study the persistence of first-year students at this local university because I wanted to aid in helping to reduce the retention rate problem.

I identified two personal biases related to higher education. One bias that I noted was that I believed students were motivated to gain a higher education degree to obtain a high-quality, high paying job requiring specialized skills. I assumed that the students were focused on obtaining better employment for earning more money. I realized this bias began in my own earlier career when I worked to obtain a degree for a better paying job. The second bias was related to affordability noting that finances for attending a university were related to retention issues; thereby a lack of finances made it difficult to continue in higher education.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study included the processes of transcribing each interview within 48 hours of the interview, coding, and then documenting the emerging themes and results. After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, I analyzed the data from the semistructured interviews using open and axial coding. I read and organized the data into categories looking for similarities about meaning using an open coding method. Next, I reviewed open codes to categorize similar concepts using axial coding (see Table 1). In rereading the axial codes, I identified commonalities, relationships, and themes that emerged from the codes.

Table 1

Coding and Emergent Themes

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Emergent Themes
Study habits, resources, organization, time management, scheduling	Hard and soft college readiness skills	Student application of college readiness skills
Family support, family, parents, college friends, older siblings, club friends, mom, sister	Encouragement, pride, support from family and on and off campus friends	Family and friend support

Open communication, zoom, orientation, summer activities, increased engagement	Communication formats, accuracy, engagement	Faculty to student communications
Advising, accuracy, meaningful, financial aid, income, campus jobs, free classes, scholarships, grants	Financial supports Individualized advising	Actions of university personnel, faculty, and advisors influence students

Evidence of Quality

Merriam (2009) indicated that member checking helps to validate the study results and increases the reliability of a study. Creswell (2012) recommended the use of member checking to safeguard against bias. After I determined preliminary findings, I emailed those findings to each participant asking for their feedback. The member checking process took approximately 20 minutes for the participants to review the preliminary findings and provide feedback. I gave the participants 10 days to provide feedback about my findings. I received feedback from 30% of the participants within a week. All respondents agreed with my preliminary findings that I had stated. If no

feedback was received, I assumed that the participant agreed with the preliminary findings.

To establish credibility during data analysis I referred to my reflective journal to incorporate my relevant thoughts. Creswell (2012) indicated that a basic qualitative research design is appropriate for collecting data from a small number of participants and developing themes to answer the research questions. I made entries in my reflective journal to document thoughts and additional ideas as time passed and understandings emerged from the semistructured interviews. Creswell explained three ways to establish accuracy and credibility of the findings: triangulation, member checking, and auditing. As noted in the previous paragraph, I selected member checking to establish accuracy and credibility of the findings.

A peer reviewer who was familiar with qualitative research and enrolled as a doctoral candidate was engaged to provide feedback regarding the results. Prior to the review, the peer reviewer signed a confidentiality statement. He compared the open and axial codes to the themes and found agreement amongst the three categories. The peer reviewer and I had discussed my biases prior to the sharing of the open codes, axial codes, and preliminary findings. Based on that discussion, the peer reviewer did not find any evidence of biases in my data analysis and results.

Discrepant Cases

Creswell (2012) indicated that discrepant cases occur when contradictory information surfaces in connection with the research questions or during data analysis.

During the data collection and data analysis processes, discrepant cases did not present among participants. After the coding process, I reviewed the transcripts for incompatible data connected to the themes. No discrepant cases or data were identified.

Data Analysis Results

The research study was based on resolving the problem of the low retention rate of the traditional-aged, first-year students at UEU. Two research questions were answered from the findings of the study.

RQ1: What factors do traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students identify that motivated them to persist into their second year of college?

RQ2: What do traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students perceive that the institution could implement to increase future students' persistence from first year to second year?

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that have motivated traditional-aged, first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students and to learn from students what they perceived that the institution could do that would increase persistence.

Initially, I sent invitational emails to approximately 65 students over a 6-week period. During that time, no volunteers agreed to participate in my study. I continued to send email invitations to students who met the established criteria over a three-month period. Overall, I sent approximately 400 invitational emails which resulted in nine participants.

Using semistructured interviews, I collected data from these nine participants using telephone conference and zoom formats that lasted approximately 45-60 minutes each. I asked each participant the interview questions and recorded each response. I made a journal entry that reflected any pertinent information about the interview. During each interview, after a brief introduction, I reviewed the consent form with the participant. I discussed with the participant the ability to withdraw without penalty at any time. I also told the participant that I will use confidentiality by always using the participant codenames such as Participant 1, etc. when reporting the results of the study. Interviews were recorded through an audio-recorder on my telephone.

Data analysis included transcribing, open coding, axial coding, analyzing for emerging themes, and writing the results of the data analysis. The participant interviews were manually transcribed within 48 hours of each interview. I reviewed each interview transcript multiple times to look for accuracy and commonalities. I read and then reread the responses and manually conducted open coding. Next, I reviewed the open codes line by line to group similar concepts using axial coding. In rereading the axial codes, I sorted common words and phrases into groups to identify themes.

Four main themes emerged from this research study. Two themes were related with RQ1. The main themes were (a) college readiness skills, and (b) support from family and friends. Two themes emerged from the interview data to answer RQ2. The themes were (a) increased faculty-to-student communications, and (b) the influence of university personnel, faculty, and advisors.

Research Question 1.* What factors do traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students identify that motivated them to persist into their second year of college? *Theme 1: Student application of college readiness skills are factors that lead to persistence from first to second year.

All participants reported a wide range of college readiness skills helped them to successfully persist for the first year with enrollment in the second year. College readiness skills and being able to apply those skills was a motivating factor for first year to second year success. The college readiness skills included study habits, use of resources, organization, scheduling, and time management.

Study Habits. Over 50% of participants interviewed believed that study habits were essential for first year success and persistence. Participant 2 indicated that study habits and study groups for classes were important for course success. Participant 4 noted the importance of study habits, participation in study groups, and taking a group study break for building relationships. Participant 4 also indicated that group study enhanced an understanding of his learning and helped to build friendships between students. Participant 4 stated "The friends that I have met while in college. We study together."

Participant 5 said that study habits helped them to learn the concepts in some courses. Participant 6 indicated that the library was a good resource as a study tool. Participant 6 also noted that belonging to clubs helped to increase peer interactions for friendship development, which led to study groups. Participant 9 indicated that study groups were a motivating factor for first year success.

Use of Resources. Approximately 30% of interviewed participants discussed resources and use of resources during the interview process. Participant 2 reported that "knowing how to access the resources on campus was vital to successful persistence." Participant 2 indicated that the use of resources involved being able to access resources effectively for pertinent questions and assistance such as study groups, financial services, scheduling of courses, and organization for scheduling purposes. Participant 5 indicated that knowing how and when to ask for help was important. Participant 7 thought that belonging to clubs provided more opportunities to learn about academic resources available on campus.

Organization. Three of the nine students interviewed noted that organizational skills were needed for first year college success. Participant 1, during their first year, came to a self-realization that this was not high school, and organization was necessary. Participant 3 indicated that being organized helped to overcome challenges and adjustment to the academic workload during the first year. Participant 7 stated that college was busy, so being organized helped with knowing where to be and what was next.

Scheduling. Over 40% of participants in my study indicated that scheduling was a factor important for academic success during the first year. Participant 1 noted the usefulness of knowing the classes to take in relation to scheduling and curriculum. Participant 2 also noted the importance of scheduling during the first year with tutoring for help in math, club participation to locate friends with common interests, and study groups for help with academic coursework. Participant 3 explained that having a schedule and calendar helped them to succeed to second year. Further, Participant 3 explained that the big part of first-year success was having a schedule that outlined courses, clubs, study groups and a calendar that showed when and what assignments were due. Participant 8 stated "I had three exams in one day. I felt overwhelmed with the deadlines. I struggled and had to be on top of schedules."

Time Management. Over 40% of those interviewed indicated time management as a factor for first year success. Participant 2 indicated that time management was important. Participant 5 noted an interconnection between having strong time

management skills and good study habits to attain high grade point averages. Participant 7 stated that hope and motivation helped with developing time management skills for the first year. Participant 9 stated "I am time conscious. I tutor other students on Fridays."

Theme 2: Support from family and friends is useful to support student persistence from first to second year.

All participants reported that family and friends were primary support factors that helped them succeed to the second year of studies. Participant 1 indicated that joining a club helped to locate on-campus friends with similar interests. Participant 2 stated that "family support helped to make it through to second year." Participant 3 stated that "parents were a huge motivation factor for retention." A personal goal that Participant 3 noted was making parents proud and operating as a brilliant role model for younger siblings through college success.

Participant 4 specified that family and friends provided emotional support during the first year. Participant 5 indicated that specific family members were encouraging and supportive during year one. Participant 6 noted that friends with similar classes and majors provided reassurance, which was appreciated during the first year. Participant 7 indicated that family and friends impacted success from first year to second year. Having a brother who did not finish college made Participant 7 want to succeed and make the family proud and to set an example for others in the family to follow.

Participant 8 noted the importance of friends and family during the first year, especially, the friends in the same classes. Participant 9 stated that "family advice and

guidance were the primary motivator for success." As an international student, Participant 9 stressed the family dynamic of constancy and chasing dreams to pursue a career. These were family traits that motivated Participant 9 for success into second year of studies at UEU.

All participants reported that they belonged to various clubs, attended activities, and made friends through these processes, which allowed them to meet other on-campus students with similar interests in a social type setting and increased their connectedness with the institution. Some of the clubs and activities mentioned in the interviews included iFest International, basketball, dances, French Club, Spanish club, Caribbean club, civic parties, Philippino-American Federation, Girl Talk, Café O'la, and gardening club.

Research Question 2. What do traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students perceive that the institution could implement to increase future students' persistence from first year to second year?

Theme 3: Increased faculty-to-student communications could increase students' persistence from first to second year.

The participant responses generated themes with possible answers to RQ2. There were two interview questions that were aligned with answering RQ2. Responses included: increase university personnel communications and student engagement, provide second year experience opportunities (i.e., orientation meetings), provide summer activities for year-round students, and expand first-year student advisor training.

Provide Second Year Experience Opportunities (i.e., orientation meetings).

Participant 1 stated that "a course much like first-year experience for second year

students with a focus on scheduling and major would be beneficial to increase retention."

Participant 1 recommended the development of a major template to guide students

through the courses related to their chosen study major as a roadmap keeping them on

track.

Provide Summer Activities for Year-Round Students. Over 40% of the

participants indicated that summer activities could help support students. Participant 6, an

international student who does not go home over the summer break, identified the need

for summer activities and networking opportunities toward second year enrollment,

which may help students to stay connected with the university social environment and

return in the fall as a sophomore. Participants 2 and 4 noted that summer tutoring for

math specific courses was supportive and helpful during the first year.

Increase University Personnel Communications and Student Engagement.

Approximately 30% of the participants reported that communications between university

personnel and students needed to be accurate, open, and include an array of format

options such as, texting, instant messaging, social media, Zoom links, and facetime, as

available. Participant 6 recommended that communications from faculty needed to be

meaningful.

Participant 7 indicated that in some lecture courses students attend, listen, and

leave without ever communicating for a full semester.

In such courses, students might not feel socially comfortable with their colleagues. Participant 7 believed that increasing communication interactions within the classroom might help students to recognize commonalities with colleagues leading to a better second year. Participant 7 noted that forming a study group helps build rapport and connection with the university. Participant 7 wanted courses to provide an opportunity to meet other students for the development of study groups and connecting.

Participant 8 stated that "open lines of communication strengthened persistence." Open communication between students, colleagues, and university personnel affects student satisfaction for persistence into second year through connections and a sense of belonging. Participant 8 noted that Zoom links were effective in providing essential information about study groups, course announcements, and digital communications for one of the courses taken. Davis et al. (2015) stated that "for this generation, social media exchanges are a primary means of communication." Nehls and Livengood (2018) stated that "while institutions of higher education are publishing information via conventional means of paper or website, students are primarily engaging through social media technology. Institutions should be mindful to approach both opportunities as useful tools to communicate with new students."

Expand First-Year Advisor Training. Over 50% of the participants interviewed (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8) indicated that advisors needed more training to better support them. Participant 1 stated that "advising is iffy." Advising and communication with the advisor for Participant 1 was inaccurate. Participant 1had taken an advisor recommended course

and discovered that the course was not on the pathway to the study major of interest. The participant felt that the time and money for the unnecessary course was wasted based on information from an advisor who guided the first-year student. Participant 2 indicated that some advisors advised students to take wrong courses that did not help students to advance in the major, so essentially the student wasted the whole first year taking courses that did not help them get through the major. Participant 2 noted that the study site did not provide support to help students engage with each other academically. Participant 2 expanded that study session announcements were not made by the university departments and that the university did not formally advertise the study sessions. Participant 2 explained that opportunities for study group meetings could be announced by the university to provide increased communication opportunities.

Participant 4, when asked about how to increase retention at the university, stated that one problem students face is the advisors. Participant 4 indicated that some students have difficulty with advisors and recommended that advisors should help students be more seriously on their path in selecting a major toward graduation. When Participant 4 asked the advisor about graduation plans, the advisor told the student that it would be the same as all students. "I think the advisor should give more individually to the student and should provide course help"

Participant 6 recommended that it would help to hire advisors or coaches who could do a first-year review at the end of the first year with students. Participant 6 also indicated that having the advisor or coach communicate meaningful advice on ways to

have a better year the next year might convince some students to return for another year.

Participant 8 indicated that the departmental advisors were not personalized. According

to Participant 8, the departmental advisors posted a list of dates and times and requested

that the student pick a time to meet from the list provided.

***Theme 4: The actions of university personnel, faculty, and advisors influence the
retention of students from first to second year.***

Theme 4 emerged as a possible answer to RQ2. Participants 5 and 6 identified

several service activities such as increased work study opportunities, that university

personnel could enact that would have a major effect on their satisfaction and persistence.

Several participants including 2, 4, 5, and 8 noted that advisors influenced students

toward either high or low satisfaction with the university experience (e.g., participants

felt that advisors should talk with and advise students on a regular basis for reassurance,

guidance, and help).

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8 cited that advisors and other university personnel

are important influences who could personalize their responses to help each student

succeed to second year. Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, and 8 indicated that advisors needed more

training to better support them. Participant 1 stated that "more course offerings such as a

course similar to FYE for the second year may help with a deeper successful year."

Participant 2 stated that "having advisors who did not offset the wrong courses would

help with persistence and retention. We need advisors who help students to get ahead in

the major." Participant 3 stated that "I would like a bit more informal forms of communication with faculty. I wish the university could invest in more digital spaces with more direct and easy communication offerings."

Participant 4 stated that "advisors should give individual attention to the students they advise." Participant 4 also indicated that the advisors need to meet with students on an individual basis and provide specific information to the academic pathway toward a major and need training. Participant 5 stated that "educational institutions could try harder to engage personally." This participant also indicated that advisors should be trained to do more than merely state the time and place of their office hours and that they should relate with each student as a separate individual.

Participant 7 reported that engagement with professors would help increase persistence and retention. Participant 7 explained that students had a difficult time learning in the class format of a large lecture hall with many students and no opportunity for question and answer. Participant 8 stated that "you need people teaching that will actively help you." Participant 8 explained that one professor used Zoom links to notify them of upcoming study groups, job openings, and other information. This student would like to see that kind of active support from all faculty.

Financial support was addressed by 45% of the interview participants (Participants 2, 5, and 9). The participants indicated that opportunities for financial support of various kinds included campus jobs, free classes, grants, scholarships, and lowered tuition rates. Participant 9 indicated that the university personnel need to expand

financial aid for all students. Financial aid and scholarships were noted as key elements in success to persist to second year. The action of university personnel influences the persistence of students as the university reviews the need for grants, work-study offerings, and scholarships, which provides the university with an opportunity to create initiatives using institutional funds to help students. The university personnel also can use creativity in integrating work study offerings with students' career interests and coursework.

Participant 2 stated that "more scholarships need to be offered." Participant 5 expressed the importance of offering a financial payment plan for each semester with repayment options. They indicated that university personnel could help retain students through financial aid measures, as described, when financial barriers stand in the way of the education.

In summary, the research study was based on resolving the problem of the low retention rate of the traditional-aged, first-year students. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that have motivated traditional-aged, first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students and to learn from students what they perceived that the institution could do that would increase persistence. Four themes emerged: student application of college readiness skills are factors that lead to persistence from first to second year, support from family and friends is useful to support student persistence from first to second year, increased faculty -to-student communications could increase

students' persistence from first to second year, and the actions of university personnel, faculty, and advisors influence the retention of students from first to second year.

Evidence of Quality

According to Smith (2021), qualitative verification procedures include clarifying researcher bias, implementing peer debriefing, using member checking, managing biases, and obtaining participant feedback. In an effort to reduce researcher bias, Creswell (2012) indicated member checking as an effective method to use. Throughout my data analysis, I attempted to manage any personal biases. Credibility, trustworthiness, and dependability of the study were at the forefront. Methods that I used for evidence of quality included sufficiency of data collection, peer review, reflective journaling, bias awareness, and member checking.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is about establishing credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability in a study. A peer reviewer who was familiar with qualitative research and enrolled as a doctoral candidate was engaged to provide feedback of the results. Although my peer reviewer has been employed in a higher education role for several years, this was their first experience as a peer reviewer.

Prior to the review, my peer reviewer signed a confidentiality statement. He compared the open and axial codes to the themes and found agreement amongst the three categories. The peer reviewer and I had discussed my biases prior to the sharing of the open codes, axial codes, and preliminary findings. After my coding, I emailed my coding

list to the peer reviewer for his feedback about neutrality. Based on that discussion, the

peer reviewer did not find any evidence of biases in my data analysis and results.

According to Shenton (2004), credibility is essential to ensuring trustworthiness. Member

checks, which are discussed further below, provided trustworthiness and accuracy for my

study.

Dependability and Accuracy

I read the transcripts numerous times to be sure the coding was accurate. After

each interview was conducted, I made reflective journal notes from the interviews and

listed anything that seemed significant. I reviewed my reflective journal notes during the

data analysis process for any insights related to persistence and retention. Member

checking was completed to obtain participant feedback. Participant feedback is important

to confirm that participants agreed with the preliminary findings.

Member Checks

Member checking helped establish credibility of my study. Following the peer

review, I began the member checking process. Creswell (2012) indicated that member

checking was one way to bring credibility and trustworthiness to data analysis. According

to Merriam (2009), member checking is an important way to eliminate misinterpretation.

The preliminary results were emailed as an attachment to the participants. I asked

participants to read the preliminary findings and send me their feedback in agreement or

disagreement of the findings.

Participants were allotted ten days for providing feedback. Three participants responded in a timely manner and indicated that they agreed with my interpretations, so no additional changes to the preliminary findings were needed. Member checking was completed with participants as they reviewed and emailed me their response to the preliminary findings that I had emailed to them. No participant disagreed with the preliminary findings.

Outcome Summary

The project study problem was the low retention rate of the traditional-aged, first-year students at UEU. The first research question addressed the factors that traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students identify that motivated them to persist into their second year of college.

Two themes emerged that answered RQ1. The first theme was student application of college readiness skills are factors that lead to persistence from first to second year. The second theme was support from family and friends is useful to support increased student persistence from first to second year.

Two themes emerged that answered RQ2. The first theme was increased faculty-to-student communications could increase students' persistence from first to second year. The second theme was the actions of university personnel, faculty, and advisors influence the persistence of students from first to second year.

Research supports themes 1 and 2 (Garcia-Ros et al., 2018; Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018; Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2020). Garcia-Ros et al. indicated that parents impact

students' college success and persistence. According to Rucks-Ahidiana and Bork, peer relationships supported a sense of belonging and connection with college through the development of on-campus friendships. Mitchall and Jaeger found that parents impacted students' college success and persistence.

Literature supports themes 3 and 4 (Ashraf et al., 2018; Lerpornkuirat et al., 2018; Rizkallah & Seitz, 2018; Sogunro, 2015). Sogunro found that effective academic advising was a factor affecting first year persistence and retention of students. According to Ashraf et al., helping students find an academic major influenced persistence and retention. Rizkallah and Seitz indicated that universities need to reconsider the strategies that provide support to first-year students for persistence to graduation. Lerpornkuirat et al. indicated that students having a connection with the university and the classmates, instructors, and learning environment was vital to persistence.

According to Tinto (1993), the more that students integrate into the institution, the more likely the students will succeed at college persistence and graduation. The social and intellectual systems in the institution influence the students' persistence through an effect on commitments and goals. The promotion of social and academic integration could aid in persistence and retention of students through increased satisfaction. Tinto professed that a student's sense of academic and social belonging influenced retention and graduation. Participants' perspectives indicated a connection between social and academic integration and college persistence and retention.

As a result of the outcomes and after consultation with my committee members, I developed a three-day professional development for advisors, which has been scheduled for April 5-7, 2023. The PD training content centers on the identification of college readiness skills related to first-year students and advising strategies to help students develop college readiness skills. The PD training also includes a brief review of Tinto's theory related to first year experience and student persistence and retention. As a result of the outcomes, the PD training includes ways to promote communication between the university and first-year students.

Through role play, scenarios, and small and large group activities, the PD training includes elements from each of the four emergent themes from my findings. Tinto (1993) argued that involvement with the campus experiences increased student goal achievement. Through my findings, I identified recommendations that institutions could implement to increase persistence which included, training for advisors, summer engagement and activities, university connections through club participation, and work study offerings.

In Section 3, I provide a brief description of the project as an outcome of the results, a rationale of why the PD training project was chosen, a review of the literature, and an evaluation plan. In addition, I include the project social change implications at a local level and in a larger context.

Section 4 highlights my reflections and conclusions about the project. I discuss strengths and limitations of the project. Research recommendations for potential study are

included for future researchers. In addition, I include what is learned about the research

process. Lastly, I describe the implications for positive social change impacts and provide

a conclusion.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Low retention rates of postsecondary, traditional aged, first-year students at a local university have created a high level of concern at the study site. The problem addressed through the three-day PD training of advisors is the low retention rate of first-year students. The PD training includes three days of small and large group work, brainstorming sessions, role plays, scenarios, and innovation-building exercises for academic advisors. The purpose of this project study was to determine the factors that have motivated traditional-aged, first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students and to learn what they perceived the institution could do to increase persistence.

There were four emergent themes: (a) student application of college readiness skills are factors that lead to persistence from first to second year; (b) support from family and friends is useful to support increased student persistence from first to second year; (c) increased faculty-to-student communications could increase students' persistence from first to second year, and (d) the actions of university personnel, faculty, and advisors influence the persistence of students from first to second year. The findings from this project study included participant perceptions about what motivated them to persist to second year and what actions may be implemented by the university to increase student retention.

Study findings indicated that there was a need for advisors to receive training to further develop their advising practices for first-year students. I developed a PD training

designed to inform first-year students' advising staff about the relevant factors that motivated participants to return as second-year students. The PD training also includes strategies advisors can implement for increased student satisfaction and enhanced student persistence and retention. Three goals were developed for the PD training:

1. Advisors will learn to analyze and plan their communication with first-year students.

2. Advisors will develop effective communication strategies.

3. Advisors will learn about the findings of my study.

Information about the factors that contribute to persistence of traditional-aged, first-year students was identified during data collection and analysis. The PD training addresses the four emergent themes.

Rationale

My project study problem was the low retention rate of the postsecondary, traditional-aged, first-year students at UEU. A PD training was selected to address the problem of low retention rate because it will offer information about the student persistence and retention. The data derived from participant interviews supported the need for advisor training. Over 50% of the participants interviewed indicated that advisors needed more training to better support them. Sogunro (2015) cited effective academic advising as a factor affecting first-year student persistence.

The PD training will provide the advisors with an opportunity to learn about the participant responses related to increasing student persistence and retention. As a result of

my findings, I selected a PD training to develop advisors' advising practices through role play, scenarios, brainstorm sessions, and group activities, which will encourage taking action to increase student persistence and retention. Dickfos (2019) indicated that multiple benefits (e.g., coaching skills, employability, and enhanced professional practices) were derived from professional development training.

According to interview participant responses, there was a training need for advisors to increase advising support, so a PD training workshop was chosen to address the low retention of first-year students at a local study site. According to Lofthouse (2019), professional development training improves relationships between institutional personnel, advisors, and students. The PD training was selected through a thorough process of consideration for the best remedy to resolve the problem of the low retention rate. During my research study interviews, participants indicated that training was needed to help advisors in guiding students.

Based on the findings, the need for a PD training was selected to encourage advisors to take action that may increase the future first-year student persistence and retention. Higher education may use PD to communicate information and provide analysis, planning, and feedback for increased retention of students (Lodhi & Ghias, 2019). Lodhi and Ghias provided suggestions that were related to my PD training, which include communication and that advisors may use with students. The PD training includes role play of advisors using communication analysis whereby the speech will be closely reviewed for perspectives, accuracy, and meanings.

Review of the Literature

The literature review presented in this section provides a summary of support options that can be implemented by advisors, advisors' supervisors, and institutions that research shows may increase future first year to second year persistence of postsecondary students. Databases that I used for this literature review included Academic Search Complete, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar and ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis database. The search terms that I used included *persistence, retention, financial and campus supports, professional development, professional development training goals, first-year college persistence, professional development training, training for advisors, understanding student persistence, analysis of college persistence and retention,* and *professional development in higher education.*

Professional Development

A PD training for academic advisors of first-year students and supervisors of the academic advisors may serve to indirectly increase the persistence and retention of future students. Pham (2021) indicated the importance of having highly trained and well-qualified faculty through PD training. According to Coomber (2019), PD is a critical tool for motivating and equipping the institutional support staff with vital information to support students. Lofthouse (2019) explained that PD enables higher education staff to develop interprofessional facilitation and learning that improves relationships with colleagues and students. Dickfos (2019) indicated that multiple benefits may be gained

from professional development experiences. According to Dickfos, coaching skills, employability skills, and improved teaching practices may result from PD training.

Segarra and Gentry (2019) stated that supplemental professional development opportunities are needed to sharpen competencies, including the ability to set a vision and goals, the ability to manage time, the ability to work on a team, the ability to collaborate outside the organization, the ability to manage others, and skills in career planning and self-awareness. Bond and Blevins (2019) indicated that the benefits of PD training include advanced knowledge and increased acceptance of organization changes. According to Tolliver and Miller (2018), PD that is effective meets the training goals, which will result in the faculty having the knowledge to identify students who are likely to leave college and provide accurate information in advising them. According to Ozen (2018), effective PD may help campus learning through an increased learning climate and the presentation of critical knowledge and valuable resources. Yagub et al. (2020) indicated that PD is important in training workers to meet changing trends.

According to Haktanir et al. (2018), advisors need to understand and support students to make a positive and successful adjustment to college. Trolian (2019) indicated that training advisors in higher education to encourage student involvement in college will aid in student motivation and career path exploration. According to Trolian, student involvement will lead to building teamwork skills and development of leadership skills.

Persistence and Retention Supports

Persistence supports for first-year students include but are not limited to first-year experience, campus environment supports, good grade point average, and financial supports. Webster et al. (2018) indicated that successful first year student transition and stress reduction were related to student success and persistence. According to Lynch and Lungrin (2018), academic advisors are being advised to evaluate their interactions related to student supports, persistence, and retention. Academic advisors have a responsibility to help students through meaningful exploration of career options and academic majors before students decide on an academic major (Lynch & Lungrin, 2018).

First Year Experience Supports

McCluskey et al. (2019) indicated that universities have worked on a strategic initiative to develop the First Year Experience (FYE) as a supportive and seamless transition from first year to second year for students. McCluskey et al. developed a first-year model that demonstrated a positive impact on student engagement, learning, and positive retention outcomes. College students who demonstrated early at-risk for drop out characteristics and participated in FYE had increased academic achievement and elevated retention (Connolly et al., 2016). According to Webster et al. (2018), the key to making students' adjustment during the first year easier and unchallenged for increased persistence in a first-year program is communication among students and faculty.

In a pilot study, Wood et al. (2016) found that preparedness for increased academics was an important component of an effective transition and persistence strategy for improving student transition, degree attainment, and success of first-year

undergraduates. Larkin and Dwyer (2016) reported in a trial intensive peer-to-peer mentoring program that participation as mentees supported engagement with studies to the end of their first semester, thereby students who participated were retained longer. This was a trial intensive study whereby students who participated in the peer-to-peer mentoring program reported better support and transition into university life, which impacted persistence for some students.

In a mixed-methods study, Wismath and Newberry (2019) indicated that one transitional benefit for students included a FYE program that involved a course on mapping assets to identify academic resources within the community. The mapping asset course included connecting academic and social resources, physical campus, students' sense of self, and goals, which provided the students with a critical analysis of their own knowledge and skills and helped the students to pinpoint their limitations. In a quantitative study from Isacco and Morse (2015), academic motivation and university connection predicted retention at the university, which signified the importance of engagement opportunities with students and university professionals to build social and academic connections for increased persistence.

Roksa and Whitley (2017) indicated the importance of institutions connecting with families through family engagement in the first year to expand family social networks for increased student success. According to Bowman et al. (2018), college sense of belonging and emotional well-being constituted vital components of first semester student adjustment and success. Some experiences were significant predictors of

successful student adjustment and persistence success during the first semester such as, time exercising and parental relationship satisfaction, which were associated with more favorable outcomes of persistence and successful student adjustment. In examining weekly data from the first semester, the findings were that students' social connection, relationship satisfaction with college friends, and feeling successful in class were related to increased engagement with positive changes in belonging and emotional well-being.

Campus Environment Supports

Schreiner and Tobolowsky (2018) found that faculty play a vital role related to first-year student success into the second year and made recommendations regarding action steps for faculty learning. The action steps included to equip faculty with the knowledge and opportunity to connect effectively with students on campus, to involve faculty in a closer examination of the second-year curriculum, and to develop learning experiences across the campus, to structure academic advising in ways that connect students to a sense of purpose, and to provide time, space, and incentives for mentoring. According to Schreiner and Tobolowsky, enabling faculty and students to increase communication with each other and develop a connection has positive academic effects on success and retention with increased student satisfaction.

Grade Point Average and Financial Supports

Zepp et al. (2018) investigated how college student academic grade point average is affected by student financial stress. Zepp et al. recommended reducing financial stress for students through the promotion of problem-focused coping and budget planning. Zepp

et al. noted that emotional well-being and positive coping skills has a positive effect on student performance, persistence, and grade point average.

DeAngelo and Franke (2016) indicated that students being college ready academically (i.e., possessing time management, having study skills, and seeking help when needed) is important for overall college persistence. According to DeAngelo and Franke, students who are less prepared academically do not receive the funding sources that their college-ready peers receive, which places them in a disadvantaged category and as less likely to persist. Having a higher gpa is obtained when students have a connection with the university, which results in increased persistence. Findings from the DeAngelo and Franke study revealed that readiness mediates the relationships between social background factors and persistence in the first year.

According to Hansen and Schmidt (2017), first-year seminar and service-learning experiences have positive effects on academic success, gpa, and year-one persistence. Mthimunya and Daniels (2019) indicated that institutions may be able to enhance persistence through the analysis of predictors toward academic performance and success. According to Mthimunya and Daniels, students who have poor academic performance may signify an early detection of retention issues for the students.

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that have motivated traditional-aged, first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students and to learn from students what they perceived that the institution could do that would increase persistence. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: student application of college

readiness skills advanced first-year success, support from family and friends was useful for increased student persistence from first year to second year, increased faculty-to-student communications could increase students' persistence and retention, and the action of university personnel, faculty, and advisors influenced the persistence of students. The PD training addresses the four themes and the conceptual framework to help remedy the low retention rate problem.

Campus environment supports reviewed in the literature were included in the designed PD training for advisors and signified the importance of communication and building university connections. According to the literature, student communications and connections with the university influence a better gpa, which results in persistence and retention of students. Student gpa and financial support were reviewed in the literature that showed their effects on student persistence and retention. The PD designed for advisors includes student support factors and pertains to the study findings related to supports that increase student persistence and retention.

Project Description

The needed resources, existing supports, potential barriers, potential solutions to barriers, roles and responsibilities, and project evaluation and implications are outlined in this section. The proposed implementation of the PD training and a timetable will also be discussed. Several resources are valuable to this project such as the training space and computer equipment used during the training delivery.

Needed Resources

The needed resources will be allocated through the local university and will include the following: a computer that is equipped for a PowerPoint presentation and downloading or transferring of files, audio and video capabilities, and access to the internet. A training location and space will be needed and made available at the local university. Other materials needed for the training will include notebooks, pens, pencils, markers, easel pad, and tape, and snacks (fresh bananas and apples, health bars, and sugar free mints), drinks (water, coffee, and a variety of diet and regular soft drinks), ice, coffee condiments, and paper products. The daily training reminder through email will be made available to the participants through the local university. The Office of Enrollment's Program Director and Department Chair who work at the local university within the departments of enrollment, recruitment, and retention will deliver the training to the advisors.

Existing Supports

The existing supports consist of the administrators who recommended that advisors attend the training, which will promote the training for a three-day delivery at the local campus. The Office of Enrollment Program Director and Department Chair have agreed to email the advisors a mark your calendar notification, which will remind advisors to mark their calendar for the training. The Program Director and Department Chair will serve as presenters for the PD training.

The university will assign a training location room equipped with a computer, capability for downloading and transferring of files, jump drive capability, and audio and video with internet access. A whiteboard with markers and eraser will be provided in the training room.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

The potential barriers for the PD training consist of advisors' time off, potential illnesses, and vacations during the time of the PD training, which may cause advisors to miss the PD training sessions. I plan to limit this barrier by scheduling the PD training at a time when the advisors will have time to devote to the training. Another barrier is that the advisors may have other professional responsibilities that could interfere with the training. This barrier may be controlled as supervisors prioritize and support the training for advisors, which may inspire their attendance. Also, potential monetary and financial resource needs that were not budgeted for this fiscal year could impact the budget creating a barrier. I plan to limit the monetary concerns by purchasing sale items (i.e., name tags, pens, notebooks, drinks, and snacks) and by using available resources at the university (i.e., white board, markers, computer, eraser). There will be minimal impacts to the budget for my project.

Timetable and Implementation Proposal

The PD training will be implemented in the spring term April 5-7, 2023. The three-day training will be structured with an agenda outlined specific to each day. The planned timeline has been provided in Appendix A and follows the university calendar. A

PD schedule for implementation follows in Table 2 as a short overview of the PD

training.

Table 2

Professional Development Schedule for April 5-7, 2023

Schedule	Activity for presenters
Day One	Overview of Schedule
	Large Group Discussion-College readiness skills identified
	Large Group Discussion-Application of college readiness skills
	Small Group Brainstorm- Relationship building
	Small Group-Advising strategies where & when to refer students
	Scenario 1 advisor & 1 student role play-Supervisors input for advisors
	Large Group Brainstorming from scenario
	Question & answer session
Day Two	Overview of Schedule
	Large Group Discussion Usefulness of family & friends support
	First-Year experience & orientation
	Brainstorming & Review of Tinto's ID model & strategies for advisors
	Small Group Discussion-Communication with first-year students
	Large Group Brainstorm Session-Innovative strategies for advising
	Question & answer session
Day Three	Overview of Schedule
	Large Group Discussion-University personnel, faculty, and advisors influence retention
	Open Discussion Brainstorming-Self-reflection on advisors' experiences
	Small Group Discussion-List important supports for admission
	Large Group Discussion-Innovation & advising
	Question & answer session

The PD training goals are:

1. Advisors will learn to analyze and plan their communication with first-year students.

2. Advisors will develop effective communication strategies.

3. Advisors will learn about the findings of my study.

The training will be offered at the local university for the university advisors and their supervisory staff. The training materials will be presented to the Admissions Office Department Chair and their Program Director for a formative evaluation prior to facilitation. The formative evaluation will be used to evaluate the training prior to the official PD training implementation. I will revise the PD training based on the formative evaluation recommendations prior to implementation.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Office of Enrollment will invite the advisors and advisor supervisors well in advance to attend the PD training. Prior to the implementation, the presenters will become familiar with the information to present at the 3-day training as scheduled. The Office of Enrollment's Department Chair and the Program Director will present the PD using the content that I will provide. Prior to the training, the presenters will organize who will present each component for a team-teaching approach. The Office of Enrollment has a major role in the success of students because enrollment is a major function of their job at the university.

In my role as PD training developer, my responsibility has been to make sure that the PD training goals will be met.

1. Advisors will learn to analyze and plan their communication with first-year students.

2. Advisors will develop effective communication strategies.

3. Advisors will learn about the findings of my study.

I will conduct a formative evaluation as aforementioned and incorporate the recommendations to improve the training. I will act as coordinator to set up the training room and make sure that the required training materials are available for the facilitators. As a training coordinator, I will so that the training runs smoothly for the facilitators and advisors.

Project Evaluation Plan

Formative evaluation will be used to evaluate my PD training to receive recommendations for changes needed prior to implementation that will improve the training. A summative evaluation could have been instituted, but the effectiveness of the training prior to delivery was my project study concern and not specifically the knowledge that advisors obtained from the training. The reason that I chose a formative evaluation was to obtain recommendations and incorporate any information that improved the PD training prior to implementation.

To conduct the formative evaluation, two university employees who are knowledgeable about student persistence will serve as my PD training formative

evaluators and will complete the formative evaluation form (see Appendix A). The two

employees, the Admissions Office Department Chair and the Director, who will represent

the target audience, will review the PD training prior to implementation and make

suggestions for the training. Their feedback will be used to make revisions that will make

the training better for the most effective PD training. The goal of the evaluation is to

obtain the recommendations of the training evaluators in order to improve the training

prior to formal implementation. The formative evaluation prior to implementation will

aid to refine the training to the highest level. The PD training goals included:

1. Advisors will learn to analyze and plan their communication with first-year
   students.

2. Advisors will develop effective communication strategies.

3. Advisors will learn about the findings of my study.

Student retention is a concern for every entity at the university due to the future

sustainability of the university because without students' and money the university will

cease to operate. For my project study, a few key university stakeholders interested in the

retention of students include the office of enrollment, the office of admissions, and the

office of advising. The office of enrollment enrolls future students at the university. The

office of admissions works to guide prospective students to programs at the university

and verifies that incoming students meet the admission criteria. Advisors help students

plan and select courses and provide support through the journey at the university that

impacts student retention.

Project Implications

Positive social change may result from increased student persistence and retention at the university, whereby students' needs are met, which will result in better employment opportunities and family livelihood for the students. The PD training provides advisors with strategies to use when providing guidance for first-year students, which will enhance the advisors job skills and deliver positive social change. Successful first-year students persist to second year when they have the strong predictor of a good gpa (Willoughby et al., 2021). According to Willoughby et al., first-year academic average, social connections at university, and club involvement are important predictors of retention, which has been noted throughout my research study. In the larger context, increased graduates may be able to gain more self-sufficiency in providing for their future career and family needs, which will result in a positive life social change. The PD training may result in advisors making an overall difference in the persistence of future first-year students to increase retention.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

The strength of this project is engagement of advisors and their supervisors in a three-day PD training program that will benefit the first-year students' persistence to second year. Professional development is an important support in higher education for effective practices (Holt & Tietjen-Smith, 2018). The PD training brings knowledge about some of the intricacies of persistence and retention of first-year students to the academic advisors and their supervisors (such as factors affecting academic retention decisions and theories about persistence and retention). In my project, one of the project strengths includes the advisors and advisors' supervisors exchanging information during the training about specific caseloads for renewed and strengthened awareness of effective advising practices and procedures.

According to McGill et al. (2020), academic advisors need increased opportunities for training and development for effective practice. My PD training was designed with role play, scenarios, and small and large group sessions to give advisors a variety of training and practice to maintain learning interest and to provide professional knowledge and technique sharing. According to Hart-Baldridge (2020), quality academic advising is key to student success, so my PD training is largely focused on quality academic advising provided by experienced facilitators. Hart-Baldridge indicated that understanding how advisors can be supported by faculty and others in the

institution is important for successful advising. My PD training will have the support of supervisors attending the training, which may provide more support in the day-to-day operations for advisors.

A question-and-answer follow-up session was included at the end of each day in the PD training, which is a strength of the project. Soto et al. (2019) indicated the importance of training and development that advances a community of learning together. My PD training offers the advisors and supervisors learning together and connecting for gaining an innovative edge in advising.

Limitations

The target audience is the advisors and the supervisors. My PD training includes a large focus on sharing advising experiences and advising practices. One limitation may be the lack of trust that may be present between advisors and their supervisors. The lack of trust may cause some advisors to feel constrained and not feel comfortable, open, and transparent about the advising problems they are experiencing in the daily job. A three-day training may not provide the advisors enough time to be able to trust the supervisors in attendance for openly sharing problems and concerns with the larger group. In addition, the facilitators are department leaders for the advisors, so the advisors may want the supervisors to think that they handle situations effectively and do not have problems when advising students.

Another limitation involves evaluating the advisors' understanding and knowledge gained from the PD training. According to Bruhn et al. (2019), PD training

participants reported improved understanding of the subject matter, but the training did not include a pre-assessment of knowledge. My PD training will not include a pre-assessment of knowledge for participants in the subject matter taught, which may prove to be a limitation. Bruhn et al. indicated that the improved knowledge and understanding after the PD training could not be proven. To assess what was learned in a PD training there must be a pre-assessment and post-assessment of the participants' subject matter to determine the knowledge and understanding and to rate the PD training effectiveness (Bruhn et al., 2019).

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The PD training was the best solution to address the problem of low retention rates at the local university; however, alternative approaches to the problem exist. For the project, a white paper might have provided recommendations to increase student retention for department head managers at the university. In a white paper, providing recommendations based on my study findings may have been an alternative approach to solving the problem of the low retention rate.

Although I am confident in my study findings and my committee's guidance, I realize that not everyone in higher education will share in my confidence. This is my first and only research project, so my qualifications to make recommendations in a white paper from my study findings may not have been accepted from department head managers and administrators who have worked in the field of education for years.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

Scholarship involves an inquisitive mind, research investigation, and fundamental tenacity and perseverance to learn the mastery of the PD training goals. According to Friberg and McKinney (2019), the scholarship of making teaching and learning an object of attention, reflection, discussion, and action is a challenge. Friberg and McKinney noted that scholarship involves specific steps including improving practices in advising, grounding results in research, and learning to critique.

I learned how to identify a problem and how to research other scholars' work for ways to resolve the problem. I investigated and learned about former researchers' work, considered the problem, and then studied possible application to resolve the problem. I learned how to critique, apply, organize, and select the research for resolving my local university's problem.

In conducting research, I learned that every participant has a perspective and an authentic voice related to their valued experiences and opinions. Through inquisitive knowledge, investigation, and application, scholarship builds a foundation for present and future learning to take place. I learned that students who read my study in the future will need literature citations and references to understand my work and explore the subject of student retention. I learned that academic articles in particular subjects were sometimes limited and that long hours of research are required for a thorough grounding in literature. I learned that to write in a scholarly manner, a clear and concise voice is required. Also, I

learned that the writing must contain easy to understand wording so any reader can comprehend the meaning.

Project Development

Project development for my study involved three steps (i.e., initiation, planning, and execution). With initiation of the project development, I established goals for the PD training. I had to research and determine the best way to meet the goals and determine what type of project was needed to meet the goals. In the planning phase of my project development, I learned that project development involves time and commitment.

According to Moore et al. (2018), one way to improve academic advising was to expand on the professional development, which has been a primary focus of my project development. I used a systematic process for development of the project. The systematic process was learned through reading, investigating, analyzing, and applying research within my project development. The main step that I learned was in project development, which involved the application of an effective method to resolve the problem of low retention and the identification of resources in development of a project template.

In the latter phase of my project, I learned how to develop a timeline and an evaluation plan, which helped to further the learning goals of the training. I learned about summative and formative evaluations and that a formative evaluation was appropriate for my PD training project. I learned that other scholars wanted me to succeed as a doctoral candidate. I identified two stakeholders who work at the university, who volunteered to complete the formative evaluation, Next, I recruited university personnel, who were

passionate about student success, to facilitate the professional development training project, which was a valuable learning experience.

In planning for the execution of my project, I learned about ways to budget for a three-day training and how to identify resources, which were considered throughout my project development. Through the development of my project, I learned how to give the knowledge learned through my research to the people who could use the information to help students be more successful through increased retention. The professional development may help to elevate the strategies of advisors to increase first-year students' retention and persistence.

Leadership and Change

According to Sahin and Celikkan (2020), a change in higher education may be necessary to meet students' needs. As a leader, I learned about and developed PD training for advisors that will provide strategies to help retain students. In a lead role as project developer, I learned how to take action for increased change and design the training for advisors. I learned about the strong connection between leadership and change and that when a change is needed, so is a leader to guide the change.

I read and learned about the various ways to address retention problems. I understand that although there has been a plethora of strategies implemented over the years to increase student retention, there are more strategies to be researched, developed, and implemented to solve the low retention rate problem. I learned that leadership requires commitment and dedication, and these were qualities exercised during the

project development. As a leader, I learned about and committed to the development of PD training for advisors that will provide strategies to help retain students.

Reflection on Self as a Scholar

This journey to complete doctoral work through conducting research and developing a project based on the research results, has strengthened my knowledge, patience, problem-solving ability, creativity, and innovation. I learned that I want to continue as a lifelong learner because there is always more information to know about every subject. Although some people are change resistant, I embrace social change as a leader in higher education for the betterment of the individual, the institution, and the community.

My reflection on self as a scholar, reveals my growth and development through critical thinking, organization skills, and leadership skills. I reflect on my learning and growth to become a better change agent for helping other students. Through this process as a graduate student, I experienced and learned about analysis of my own strengths, weaknesses, and scholarship. I have analyzed my growth as a scholar learning patience and the importance of social change and making a difference. I learned that I want to help students succeed. Through years of academic study, I learned that I have advanced my knowledge and developed into a scholar.

Being a scholar, I learned about the organized and systematic way for learning, the betterment of society through social change, and the importance of student retention. My scholarly process throughout this program has involved research through long hours

of data collection, data analysis, and writing my study findings. As a researcher, I have gained extensive knowledge about how to conduct research, how to recruit and interact with participants. I learned how to use member checking processes in a scholarly manner.

Reflection on Self as a Practitioner

At my doctoral residency, I learned that through hard work I could become a practitioner and leader in higher education. My residency provided opportunities for growth, development, and confidence as a doctoral practitioner. At residency, I was inspired to be a public speaker and shared my ideas for research with all the attendees at residency. Although I was nervous, I had an amazing experience of addressing the entire group without practice. As I addressed the large group, my confidence level increased. My residency experience was supportive and engaging for my future learning.

I have learned and recognized my passion for helping others to be successful, which has been practiced and perfected through this program. Through research, I have learned to become an advocate for student retention in the higher education field because I learned that I care about what the students have to say, and I value their perspectives. I learned that having a strong academic record and advanced knowledge has anchored my skills for helping other students to excel and become successful learners.

Reflection on Self as a Project Developer

Through my project development I learned that to become a scholar in higher education, intense work and time were needed. I learned that to be a good project developer I had to remain flexible and incorporate new ideas into my PD training. Project

development has increased my leadership and instructional design skills. As I reflect on self as a project developer, I recognized my enthusiasm was renewed from the development of a PD training project that may help make a positive social change in my local community. As a project developer, I gained effective communication skills and broadened my knowledge through working hard. Using PowerPoint, other digital platforms and software through my project development has strengthened my technological skills and helped me learn more about new technology.

This project development journey has helped me to learn how to practice innovation and creativity in designing training for others. As I worked on my project, new ideas emerged. I learned through the development of a PD training project that I can have a positive influence on the future of students' retention. This was as an opportunity of a lifetime to learn about retaining students and the factors that positively influenced student persistence and retention.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The importance of comprehensive research has been acknowledged for many years in higher education. My entire journey is reflected through the exhaustive work and perpetual learning from the first class to the final chapters of my capstone. The level of my personal passion for student success was profound throughout this journey. The findings of the data analysis guided the PD training, which may help to increase future student persistence and retention. The development of a PD training to increase first-year persistence has been the finale for this project study. My enthusiasm to help others and

make a positive social impact with my own goal accomplishment has developed into an

incredible journey with a lifelong commitment to higher education and helping students

reach success.

I have learned the importance of patience and time management while planning

for the rigor of the research with concise and clear scholarly writing. I have learned that a

positive social change may result in increased persistence and retention at the university

whereby students' needs are met, which will result in better employment opportunities

and family lives for the students.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Implications for Positive Social Change

My professional development project will contribute to a positive social change

when advisors learn strategies to increase student retention at the university, which will

result in better employment opportunities and family lives for the students. Through my

study findings, I learned that a variety of college readiness skills were needed for success

during the first year including being able to use needed resources, apply time

management skills, and implement strong study habits. I learned that there are specific

factors such as advising, communications, and various financial supports such as

financial aid, scholarships, and campus work opportunities that may lead to first year

success.

The PD training designed as my project may advance the knowledge of university

staff about first-year students' persistence and retention. Several factors that could be

implemented by the university personnel may result in increased student persistence such as offering work opportunities, providing flexible loan payment options, and increasing and improving communications with advisors. Potentially, with increased retention of students the university may graduate more students, which is a positive social change for the individual student, the university, and the community.

As the participants who attend the three-day PD training apply the knowledge about first-year persistence and retention, they may influence an increase in the future retention rates at the university. My research findings applied to any academic setting will result in an increased satisfaction level for students, and thereby may increase the persistence and retention of students. The design of a PD training for university academic advisors and supervisors may increase the retention of future first-year students and may influence the communication interactions with students and advisors to produce a positive outcome on persistence and retention. The PD training will provide the academic advisors and their supervisory staff with findings-based information to enhance future persistence and retention of students.

Many ways to further research on retention have been discussed throughout this study. Future research is imperative to expand the body of knowledge that exists about the persistence and retention of first-year students. To build on the findings of my study, a future researcher may survey an increased population of second-year students to double the number of participants.

For future research, I would suggest an online survey to allow participation of all second-year students. I suggest that an online survey be used because this generation of students seem technology familiar, which may promote more students to provide feedback for the future research. For the online survey, I suggest repeating the interview questions that I used in my study, which could be helpful to obtain supports that the students needed for persistence from a larger sample of students. A research question that future researchers may ask is what useful strategies could increase first-year students' retention.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that motivated traditional-aged, first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students and to learn from those students what they perceived that the institution could do that would increase their persistence. Persistence of first-year students is imperative to increase graduation rates. Academic advisors work closely with first-year students to increase their persistence and retention to graduation.

The PD training that I developed and included in Appendix A may help advisors gain strategies that they will use to increase future student persistence. All students will begin as first-year students and can benefit from advising to help them to persist to second year. This doctoral process has provided me with professional and personal growth, knowledge, and experience that will be useful in my higher education career.

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Appendix A: The Project

This project is a three-day professional development training titled, *Retention Pathways*. At a southeastern US university, the low retention of postsecondary, traditional-aged first-year students to second year was a problem. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that have motivated postsecondary traditional-aged, first-year students to return to UEU as second-year students and to learn from students what they perceived that the institution could do to increase persistence. The designed PD training may help to solve the problem. The target audience of the training is first-year students' advisors. The PD training goals included:

1. Advisors will learn to analyze and plan their communication with first-year students.

2. Advisors will develop effective communication strategies.

3. Advisors will learn about the findings of my study.

Appendix A: Retention Pathways

Facilitator Agenda Day One-see Facilitator Notes on the slides
8:30 a.m.-9:30 a.m. (Slides 1, 2, 3, 4)

Open Large Group Discussion on Theme 1-Student application of college readiness skills advance first-year student's success. Lead the discussion: skills for development of a list "College Readiness Skills List". The list of college readiness skills will be developed through group discussion (See slide 4). To begin the discussion, ask participants, what are college readiness skills?

9:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m. (Slide 4)

1) Brainstorm discussion about how the student application of college readiness skills look when applied in the university setting. One example is that a student not only recognizes that studying is important, but the student locates a bi-weekly study group to join independently. (Note the college readiness skills needed may include teamwork, study skills, problem-solving).

10:30 a.m.-10:45 a.m. Break

10:45 a.m.-11:45 a.m. (Slide 5)

Open the discussion and request that attendees make 3 small groups. Each group will make a list of ways to identify students who have proficient application of college readiness skills. To stimulate discussion, ask how important these skills are for students? Another question is how can advisors help students who lack college readiness skills?

11:50 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m. (Slide 5)

Lead the discussion: Discuss ways that first-year students implement proficient application of college readiness skills and explain how this is visible in the university setting. Discuss ways that advisors may aid students who do not possess these skills.

2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. (Slide 6)

Scenario- Participants' role will be that of an observer; Role of facilitators-one portrays a student and the other an advisor. Discussion follows the scenario as instructed on the ppt.

3:00-4:00 p.m. (Slide 7)

Begin the large group discussion about what could have been ways to help the student from the scenario effectively.

4:00-4:45 p.m. **(Slide 8)**

Lead the Questions/Answer Session-Recap theme for the day—Adjourn

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Retention Pathways
Agenda Day Two

8:30 a.m.-9:30 a.m. (Slides 9,10)

Open Large Group Discussion on the first theme for Day 2-Support from family and friends is useful to increase student persistence from first year to second year. To stimulate the discussion:

1) Identify ways that family and friends is useful to the retention of some students.

2) Do family members and friends recognize the support from them may be useful to first-year students?

9:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m. (Slides 11, 12)

Lead the discussion for ideas ask: 1) How and when can advisors convey this theme to the students, family, and friends?

10:30 a.m.-10:45 a.m. Break

10:45 a.m.-11:45 a.m. (Slides 13, 14)

With the group review and have a brainstorm discussion to understand the importance of Tinto's Institutional Departure Model. See the ppt. for instructions on slides 13, 14.

11:50 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m. (Slide 15)

Request that participants count off by the number 3. Break same #s into small groups for a discussion. Discuss Theme 3-Increased faculty-to-student communications could increase students' persistence and retention. Discuss multiple ways to increase communication with students.

2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. (Slide 15)

Lead a discussion: Discuss what methods of communication are used when advisors talk with students. Discuss the most common ways that advisors communicate with students. See ppt.

3:00-4:00 p.m. (Slide 16)

Lead the large group discussion. See the ppt. slide 16.

4:00 p.m.-4:45 p.m. (Slide 17)

Provide Questions/Answer Session-Recap the themes for the day and adjourn

Retention Pathways
Agenda Day Three

8:30 a.m.-9:30 a.m. (Slide 18)

Lead the discussion on Theme 4-The action of university personnel, faculty, and advisors influence the persistence of students. Ask the group: 1) What are your first thoughts about the theme for the day? 2) Ask the group: Do you recognize actions that the university could take to increase the persistence rates of first-year students?

9:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m. (Slide 19)

Facilitator lead discussion by asking: 1) How many advisors and supervisors are aware of actions that the university could take to increase the potential for increased retention of students? Discuss potential actions of the university to increase retention.

10:30 a.m.-10:45 a.m. Break

10:45 a.m.-11:45 a.m. (Slide 20)

Open the discussion by asking: Where did you get your degree? What were some considerations that you or a family member(s) considered when you were deciding on a college for attendance? During the discussion create a list titled, "Important for Admission".

11:50 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m. (Slide 21)

Ask students to break into smaller groups. Review the list "Important for Admission" and discuss some innovative ideas that could facilitate action of the university that may help to retain students. Lead the discussion in the context of financial, summer activities, engagement, social opportunities, study supports, and ways to market the university.

2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. (Slide 22)

Lead the discussion: Lead the discussion about positive ways to incorporate ideas from the former discussion at university.

3:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m. (Slide 22)

Lead the large group work. See the slide for instructions.

4:00 p.m.-4:45 p.m. (Slide 23)

Facilitate a discussion about the identification of one innovative strategy for a takeaway to help first-year students when advising.

4:45 p.m. Questions/Answer Session, Recap the themes and adjourn **(Slide 24)**

Professional Development Schedule for April 5-7,2023 Two Daily Facilitators

Schedule	Activity
Day One	Overview of Schedule
	Open Large Group Discussion-College readiness skills identified &
	Large Group-Application of college readiness skills
	Open Small Group Brainstorm- Relationship building
	Begin Small Group-Advising strategies where & when to refer students
	Scenario 1 advisor & student role play-Supervisor input for advisors
	Open Large Group Brainstorming from scenario
	Question and answer session
Day Two	Overview of Schedule
	Open Large Group Discussion Usefulness of family & friends support
	First-Year experience & orientation
	Brainstorming & Review of Tinto's ID model & strategies for advisors
	Begin Small Group Discussion-Communication with first-year students
	Open Large Group Brainstorm Session-Innovative strategies for advising
	Question & answer session
Day Three	Overview of Schedule
	Large Group Discussion-University personnel, faculty, and advisors influence persistence
	Open Discussion Brainstorming-Self-reflection on advisors' experiences
	Begin Small Group Discussion-List important supports for admission
	Open Large Group Discussion-Innovation & advising
	Question & answer session

Formative Evaluation Form

Evaluation Form for University Admissions (Prior to Implementation of PD Training)

Please add your suggestions, recommendations, and/or comments for each training element on the chart below. Thanks for your evaluation.

Formative Evaluation Element	Please add your suggestions, recommendations, and/or comments about the training element below.
How might Day One agenda be improved to flow more smoothly?	
How might Day Two agenda be improved to flow more smoothly?	
How might Day Three Agenda be improved to flow more smoothly?	
How much timing would you suggest for questions at the end of each day?	
What changes would you recommend to small group activities?	
What changes would you recommend to the large group exercises?	
What changes would you recommend to the	

scenario exercises?	
Other recommendations	

RETENTION PATHWAYS

3-Day Professional Development Training

Facilitator's Notes: Facilitator 1 will welcome the participants, complete introductions, and provide housekeeping notations and ask participants to adjust telephone volumes. Facilitator 1 will inform the participants that if they need to make or receive a call or send messages to wait until break--unless it is urgent. If the call is urgent, just walk out of the room to a quiet location to minimize distractions. Facilitator 2 will hand out agenda copies to participants, so they have the outline for the training.

These four themes will be discussed throughout our 3-day training program. These themes are research-based and were the findings from an analysis of participant interviews during a qualitative research study at this university.

Welcome to
Day 1
Professional
Development
Training

Goals:
The PD goals included: 1) advisors will learn to analyze and plan their communication with first-year students, 2) advisors will develop innovative communication strategies, and 3) advisors will learn about the findings of my study.
Slides 1-8
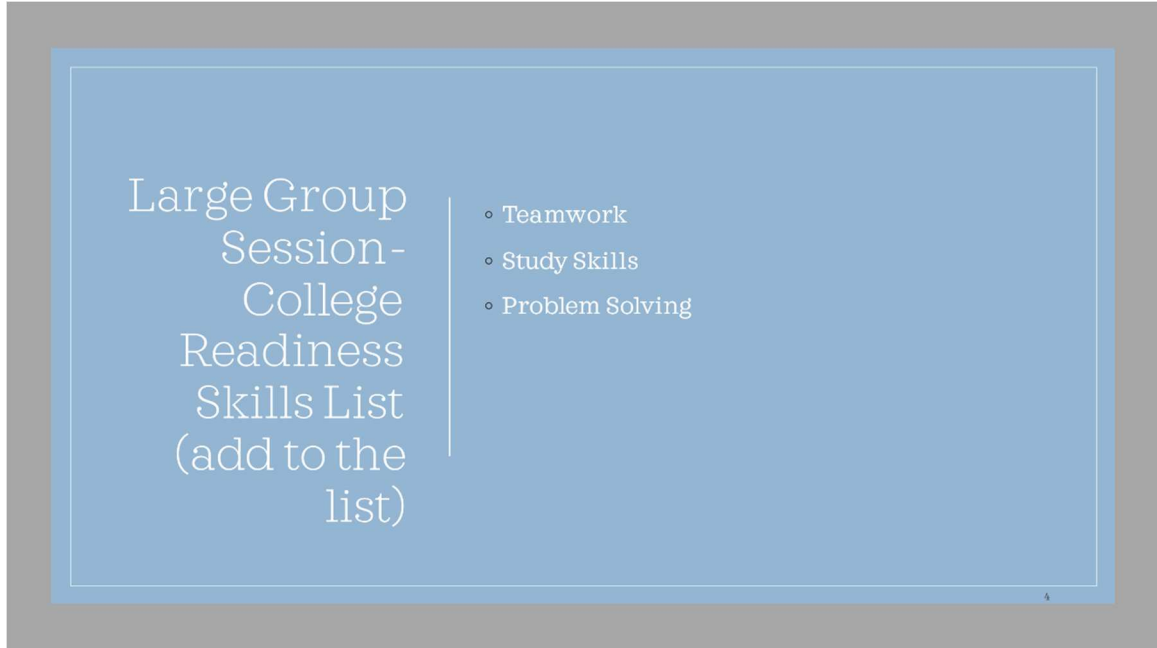
AGENDA- DAY ONE
- **8:30 a.m.-9:30 a.m. (Slide 1, 2, 3, 4)**
- Open Large Group Discussion on Theme-1- Student application of college readiness skills advance first-year student's success. Identify skills for development of a list "College Readiness Skills List" A list has been started and add to the list.
- 1) Ask participants, what are college readiness skills?
- **9:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m. (Slide 4)**
- 1) Discuss how does the proficient application of those skills look when applied in the university setting. One example is that a student not only recognizes that studying is important, but the student locates a study group to join independently. (Note the college readiness skills needed may include teamwork, study skills, problem solving)
- **10:30 a.m.-10:45 a.m. Break**
- **10:45 a.m.-11:45 a.m. (Slide 5)**
- Break into 3 small groups. Each group should outline and make a list of ways to identify students who lack student application of college readiness skills, how important these skills are for students, strategies for advisors about how you as an advisor can help students who may lack these skills?
- **11:50 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Lunch**
- **1:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m. (Slide 5)**
- Review advising strategies for advisors. Knowing when and where to refer students. Share a case load scenario of a student who has an unidentified disability and who needs help with scheduling courses, staying on track for the course, and a lack of studying skills. Brainstorm problem resolve with a group setting.
- **2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. (Slide 6)**
- Scenario Participants' role will be observer; Role of facilitator- one portrays a student and the other an advisor. Participants need to discuss the scenario as instructed on the ppt.
- **3:00-4:00 p.m. (Slide 7)**
- Large group discussion about what could have been ways to help the student from the scenario effectively.
- **4:00-4:45 p.m. Slide 8)**
- Questions/Answer Session Recap theme for the day Adjourn

3

Facilitator's Notes: Facilitator 1 will remind participants that confidentiality must be kept throughout the training. Student names will be kept confidential and not shared during training. Facilitator 2 will write responses for the large group discussion onto a large easel pad, visible to all the participants. Lead the discussion.
Facilitator 1-When asking participants to define college readiness skills, please ask two participants to share their definition of these skills.

Facilitator 2 will add college readiness skills throughout the large group session onto a large easel pad at the front of the room as groups and/or individuals note additional skills. Facilitator 1 leads the discussion.

Facilitator 1 will ask participants to be thinking about students whom they serve who display college readiness skills with excellence and think about students who do not seem to possess college readiness skills. (Please remind participants to not share names of students).
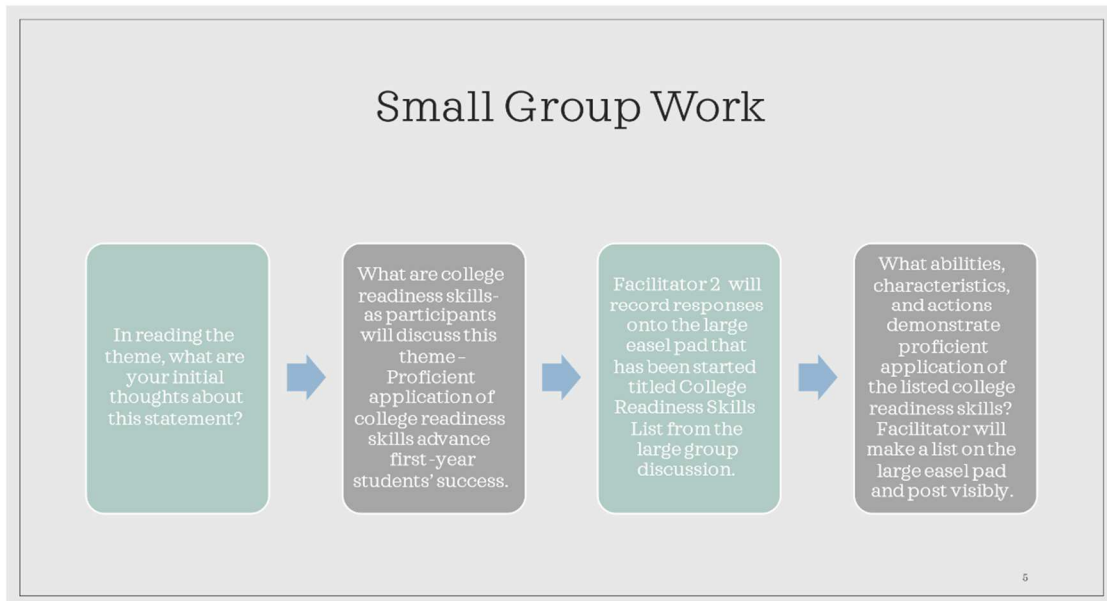
Facilitator1 will lead the discussion for the small group work. Ask everyone to count off by 3's and break into same number groups for the small groups work. Facilitator 2 will write additional college readiness skills onto the large easel pad, while Facilitator 1 directs and guides the discussion. Facilitator 2 will tape the large easel pad discussion pages along the room for visibility and to generate discussions.

Probing conversation-Facilitator 1 will ask participants-As an advisor, how will you help students who possess college readiness skills, but who do not know how to adequately apply the proficiency to advance success? For example, a student who has good study skills, yet does not know where to study, how much to study, attends parties when tests are approaching, etc.,

Scenario Day One
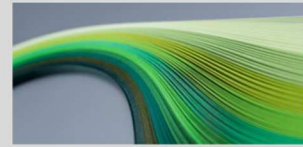
- One facilitator portrays a first-year student who has advanced academic performance and has advanced social interaction skills and teamwork skills. The student does not do well with work outside the larger group setting. When independently expected to meet academic assignments, the student does not meet deadlines and turns in less than expected work.

- The other facilitator portrays an advisor who has been with the institution for one year.

- The first-year student is required to work independent of a group for a particular assignment. He worries about his performance and ability to keep his high gpa.

- His advisor reaches out to him to see how he is doing for the semester. He reacts that he is not going to continue doing well academically due to his inability to work with the group for the next several assignments. The advisor reassures him that he will do fine and cuts the call short to attend a zoom meeting.

- What would be recommendations, advice, and guidance that the advisor should make to help him succeed?

6

Facilitator 1-Portrays a student needing some advice and assistance. Facilitator 2-Portrays an advisor. After acting out the scenario, Facilitator 1 will ask the question to participants as follows: What would be recommendations, advice, and guidance that the advisor should make to help the student succeed? Facilitator 2 will write responses onto the large easel pad. Note the various ways and styles of aiding the student. Does any method stand out as the best method to help the student? What suggestions are available from the advisors to help the student? Be sure to thank everyone for the sharing of ideas and innovative ways to help this student from the scenario to remain in the program and retained.

Open the Scenario for Group Discussion

○ For Group Discussion--Identify and discuss the overall most efficient ideas that could have been used to help the scenario student remain in the program and perform effectively and efficiently.

○ Ask Participants to --Recognize the ways that the advisors are communicating and reaching out to help the student.

○ Reflection-Take a moment of silence--Ask participants to have a moment of reflection to think of their caseload and measure new ways that they may communicate with and reach out to students who have academic weaknesses. Inform participants that they will be asked to share a new innovative way to support, guide, and/or help a student on their caseload before training ends.

7

Facilitator 1 will list the ideas for helping the student maintain a good gpa onto the easel pad using colorful markers.
Facilitator 2 will conduct the discussion with participants.

Questions- Comments?

○ Recap-Theme One

○ Remind students of the importance of being an advisor to students

○ Thank them for their willingness to learn and recognize new and innovative ideas to bring to the table

○ Reminder of sessions for tomorrow

8

Welcome Day 2 Professional Development Agenda

Goals:
The PD goals included: 1) advisors will learn to analyze and plan their communication with first-year students; 2) advisors will develop innovative communication strategies, and 3) advisors will learn about the findings of my study.
Slides 9-17

- **AGENDA DAY TWO**
- **8:30 a.m. -9:30 a.m. (Slides 9, 10)**
- Open Large Group Discussion on Theme 2 -Support from family and friends is useful for increased student persistence from first year to second year.
- 1) Could family and friends support be useful to the retention of some students?
- 2) Do family members and friends recognize the support from them may be helpful to first-year students?
- **9:30 a.m. -10:30 a.m. (Slides 11, 12, 13)**
- 1) Brainstorming: Relationship building How can advisors galvanize the concept of family and friends importance during first year experience orientation in conveying this theme to the students, family, and friends?
- **10:30 a.m. -10:45 a.m. Break**
- **10:45 a.m. -11:45 a.m. (Slides 13, 14)**
- Facilitators will discuss understanding of the importance of Tinto's Institutional Departure Model in relation to strategies for advisors. Brainstorm ways to incorporate Tinto's ID Model into daily use.
- See the ppt. for notes
- **11:50 a.m. -1:00 p.m. Lunch**
- **1:00 p.m. -2:00 p.m. (Slide 15)**
- Count off by the # 3. Break same #s into small groups and discuss Theme 3 -Increased faculty-to-student communications could increase students' persistence and retention. Discuss multiple methods of communication.
- **2:00 p.m. -3:00 p.m. (Slide 15)**
- Small Group work to discuss what methods of communication are available for advisors to talk with students. Discuss the most common ways that advisors use to communicate with students. (See ppt.) Brainstorm other ways to communicate with students through technology or perhaps message boards?
- **3:00-4:00 p.m. (Slide 16)**
- Large group discussion. See the ppt.
- **4:00 p.m. -4:45 p.m. (Slides 17)**
- Questions/Answer Session -Recap the themes for the day and Adjourn
-

9

Facilitators-Facilitator 1 will provide housekeeping rules and will write the responses onto the easel pad from the large and small discussions while Facilitator 2 will review slides and will guide the discussions interjecting reminders of the days two themes. Ask probing questions when needed. Read the goals aloud.

Facilitators Notes: These four themes will be discussed throughout our 3-day training workshop. These themes are research-based on participants' interviews during a qualitative research study at this university.

Open Large Group Discussion

- Many first-year students experience independence during the first year of college, and they need the support from family and friends.
- Facilitator 1 will lead a group discussion about ways to solidify the theme of family and friends support for first year success during the first year experience orientation when many family members are present at the university.
- Facilitator 2 will make a list of ideas and positive thinking about ways to inform family and friends about their support for the student's first year success from the discussion of the large group responses.
- Title the list of ideas "Communication Ideas" onto the large easel pad.

Facilitator 1 will lead the discussion. Remind advisors that many first-year students have never been away from home and need more supports than others may need. Some students may function independently while others may not know how to apply independence skills. They are learning, and we need to help them with supports as much as possible so they can be successful and learn independence while in our program at the institution. Facilitator 2 will write the responses onto a large easel pad.

Advisors as partners and allies and the outcome is beautiful with increased retention of students.

Facilitator 1 will share this as food for thought. The participants need to recognize that they all have valuable ideas of ways and innovation in supporting students to stay focused and persistent. As a working team, they can brainstorm together for new ways to provide help and support to students. A weekly coffee club discussion or working brunch will help the to become more aware of the issues other advisors may be experiencing, and they should be helping one another throughout the day, week, and year for innovative ideas.

Tinto's Institutional Departure Model

- Tinto's theory resulted from his work to see what can be done to enhance student retention in higher education.
- Rizallah said in 1987-Tinto proposed the dynamic model of institutional departure, stating that student retention was clearly dependent on the student's institutional experiences.
- Students who were satisfied with the formal and informal academic and social systems in a college or university tended to stay in school.
- Negative interactions and experiences result in college withdraw from their peers, faculty members, and ultimately the institution.
- Ask students, How many of you know the retention rate of this university?
- Ask students, Do parents and students consider the retention rates prior to admission at the institution?
- Rizkallah, E., & Seitz, V. (2017). Understanding student motivation: A key to retention in higher education. *Scientific Annals of Economics of Business, 64*(1), 45-57. https://doi:10.1515/saeb-2017-0004

Facilitator 2 will review the slide. Please tell: Tinto's theory of Institutional Departure was research related to first-year students in higher education. The question below may stimulate thinking about the correlation of retention rates, admission rates, and advisors' impact on these frameworks of the institution.

An example to share to initiate discussion, how can advisors assist students to develop a sense of belonging so that they feel a connection with the institution?

Facilitator 2: As you read the six factors, ask for any input, shared stories from caseloads, and/or ideas to signify Tinto's theory understanding and relevance to the advising role. When students develop a connection with the institution they may finish and succeed as this is their "home away from home". Another shared example of Tinto's theory is that self-efficacy is the student's belief in their ability to succeed. The theory is a learned belief that can help the student to achieve a goal. Another point of Tinto's theory for discussion is that when a student values their program, they know their time is not wasted and that they are on the path for success.

Small Group Discussion

Theme 3 increased faculty-to-student communications could increase students' persistence and retention.

- Small group discussion: Remind the participants to think openly about communication avenues for students. Discuss the following notations in relation to assigned caseloads. Select one communication method that may help students reach out and communicate with advisors. How many communication methods are new, innovative, for communication venturing away from the normal "Office Hours are Posted" method.

- A facilitator will add to the large easel pad the essence of the "Communication Ideas" onto the board titled Communication Ideas from the large group discussion earlier.

- Questions that may probe more in-depth responses--

- In general, how do students communicate daily? What are their communication modes? For friends, for academics, for family, and for advising? For social connections and for academic connections what are the communication modalities used?

- When students express needing help, as advisors, what does the help look like through a communication lens? Do you as an advisor call them, text, email them? No answer is wrong collect the data and consider the options for students.

- What do we do on a day-to-day basis to help students with challenges and barriers?

- How do we communicate our willingness to help students?

- Can you add one more mode of communication for students to use in reaching out to you as an advisor?

15

Facilitator 1: Note that an advisor helping a student(s) is a complicated process with success and with failure. The bottom line is the help, guidance, and advice, from an advisor can be significant to enhance the persistence and retention of students. Facilitator 1 will use the ways to communicate list from the large group discussion this morning and add to the list. Facilitator 2 will add to the list from earlier this morning titled, *Communication Ideas*, throughout the small group discussion.

For Large Group Discussion in the Afternoon

○ Look at the Easel Pad from the small group titled "Communication Ideas"

○ Ask the participants to review the list and look for at least one new way to reach out and communicate with the students on their caseload. The participants may share a new way to network and communicate with students. Reiterate the importance of having a multitude of ways to communicate with students.

○ Communication with advisors is critical to the retention of students. Read John's scenario then have 10 minutes to think about the two following questions. Do not share this is for individualized concentration and caseload application.

○ John, who was a first-year student, always wanted to become a lawyer. After he entered the university, he was advised to take Math 100, Science 101, Art 200, and American Literature 201. These classes were available and not full, so he enrolled. The following year, he discovered that the pathway to become a lawyer does not require Math 100, but Math 101. Science was not a requirement for his major and neither was Art. He felt like he had wasted a year of studies both time and money wasted. Do you think he stayed at the university for another year? Do you know the major curriculum requirements to accurately advise students?

○ For sharing in the Larger Group-What are ways that advisors can ensure that the information they are sharing with students is correct? What methods do you use to ensure you are providing accurate guidance to students? Share proactive ways to help guide students to their major and required courses.

17

Facilitator 1 will ask the participants to review the *Communication Ideas* list to identify new ways to communicate with students that may work for them. Facilitator 2 will read the scenario of John and ask the probing questions to initiate a discussion about helping students.

Questions- Comments?

○ Recap-Themes for Day Two

○ Support from family & friends is critical from first year to second year.

○ Varieties of communication platforms increase students' persistence & retention.

○ Remind participants of the significance of their position in the university as an advisor

○ Acknowledge the impact that they can make on students' retention

○ Thank them for their participation and sharing of ideas to learn together

○ See you all tomorrow!

17

Facilitator 1 will provide housekeeping and telephone expectations. Facilitator 2 should begin the Large Group Discussion. Remind the participants that there are no wrong answers. Read the training goals.

These four themes will be discussed throughout our 3-day training workshop. These themes are research-based on participant interviews during a qualitative research study at this university.

Large Group Discussion

○ Facilitator 1 will write responses onto the easel pad-use lots of bold colored markers.

○ Facilitator 2 will ask participants- Where did you get your last degree? and What were some considerations that you or a family member(s) considered when you were deciding on a college for attendance?

○ Record the item noted as a consideration for admission on the easel pad sheet titled, "Important for Admission"

22

Facilitators may share examples during the discussions. There are no wrong answers.

Small Group Discussion

University actions affect retention

○ **Small Group -** With your own caseload of students in mind-Do not think any idea is impossible. Freely think and freely share innovative ideas and complete the following.

○ Ask for a volunteer to write the ideas on the easel pad-keeping ideas clear and simple.

○ Identify one financial support that can be taken or considered that may increase student persistence and retention.

○ Identify one social support that can be considered that may increase student persistence and retention.

○ Identify one action that may increase student safety on campus in a study setting, a class setting, or other setting.

○ Identify one innovative summer activity that may be coordinated to help develop an academic family setting.

○ Identify one way to **actively** engage with students, faculty, and other university personnel that will broaden the engagement of students.

23

Facilitator 1 will review the slide and ask groups to count off by 3s and form into small groups. Facilitator 2 will walk around the various groups reminding groups of Theme 3 and help answer any questions.

Facilitator 1 will lead the discussion while Facilitator 2 reviews the slide. Participants need to recognize that ideas may surface that seem impossible, but with teamwork and communication ideas, whole or in part, can make a difference in student retention.

Identify one innovative strategy for interacting with a student on your caseload

○ Ask the large group of participants to focus on retention of students and the themes. Ask each participant to identify one innovative strategy from the training that will help them to guide, direct, mentor, and/or help a student on their caseload.

26

Facilitators will review the four themes for the PD training and will direct the discussion. Please commend the advisors for their participation and learning.

Questions-Comments ?

○ Recap-Themes for Day Three

○ Day Three Theme-The action of university personnel, faculty, and advisors influence the persistence of students.

○ Questions??

○ We are all in this together to help students succeed.

○ For students, we act as students' parents, cheerleaders, helpers, friends, comrades, coaches, biggest supporters!

○ We care about their success to graduation!

○ We are Advisors!

○ The End.

24

Facilitators will thank the advisors and their supervisors for their participation and contribution to the 3-day PD training. We value them and their guidance to help retain students.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Questions

I. Introduce myself as researcher to the participant(s).

II. Read the consent form verbally to the participant.

III. Clarify any questions about the consent form.

IV. Reiterate the audio-recording device will now be turned on for recording.

V. Inform the participant(s) of the codename assignment; obtain his/her official name and contact information, log the date and time.

VI. Start the interview asking the ten interview questions as stated below.

VII. Follow-up throughout the interview as needed with probing questions.

VIII. End the interview and reiterate the member checking process with participant(s) noting that member checking will take place following preliminary findings for their review.

IX. Thank the participant(s), share contact information for any questions.

Interview Questions

RQ1-What factors do first-year postsecondary students identify motivated them to persist into their second year of college?

1. Could you tell me about what supports impacted your success as a first-year student who has persisted from first year to second year?

Probe: Could you talk more deeply about the factor that you mentioned related to your first-year experience? In what way was that support useful for your persistence?

2. Tell me about what factors impacted your persistence to second year.

Probe: What role do other people in your environment play in your persistence?

3. During your first year, in what social clubs, activities, and events did you participate?

Probe: How did these extracurricular activities aid in your second-year return?

4. What supports in your program were necessary for you to successfully persist to a second year of studies?

Probe: How did your program instructor inspire your persistence?

5. What motivated you to continue for a second year of studies at UEU?

Probe: Can you shed more light on your primary factor of motivation? Are you a self-motivated student?

6. Tell me about problems, barriers, or challenges you overcame to persist to second year.

Probes: How did your family and friends and instructors help you to persist?

7. How did you overcome the identified barriers to persist to your second year?

Probe: What role did communication play in your success to overcome barriers?

8. How did UEU support you to engage academically, as a first-year student, to persist to second year?

Probe: Were study groups a part of your engagement process? You mentioned the library workers being helpful, is the library a primary location for engagement?

RQ2- What do traditional-aged, first-year postsecondary students perceive that the institution could implement to increase future students' persistence from first year to second year?

9. What can educational institutions implement, create, investigate, and/or do to increase the retention of first-year students?

Probe: Understanding that every first-year student may have different needs, how can the university meet the needs for retention?

10. How can retention of first-year students be increased at UEU?

Probe: Why do you think this strategy may aid in increasing retention?